Joseph Conrad

Robert MacDuff
1930.

VICTORY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

THE MIRROR OF THE SEA
THE SECRET AGENT
A SET OF SIX
UNDER WESTERN EYES
CHANCE

VICTORY

AN ISLAND TALE

BY

JOSEPH CONRAD

CALLING SHAPES AND BECKONING SHADOWS DIRE
AND AIRY TONGUES THAT SYLLABLE MEN'S NAMES
ON SANDS AND SHORES AND DESERT WILDERNESSES.
COMUS

SEVENTEENTH EDITION

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TO

PERCEVAL

AND

MAISIE GIBBON

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE last word of this novel was written on the 29th of May 1914. And that last word was the single word of the title.

Those were the times of peace. Now that the moment of publication approaches I have been considering the discretion of altering the title-page. The word Victory, the shining and tragic goal of noble effort, appeared too great, too august, to stand at the head of a mere novel. There was also the possibility of falling under the suspicion of commercial astuteness deceiving the public into the belief that the book had something to do with war.

Of that, however, I was not afraid very much. What influenced my decision most were the obscure promptings of that pagan residuum of awe and wonder which lurks still at the bottom of our old humanity. Victory was the last word I had written in peace time. It was the last literary thought which had occurred to me before the doors of the Temple of Janus flying open with a crash shook the minds, the hearts, the consciences of men all over the world. Such coincidence could not be treated lightly. And I made up my mind to let the word stand, in the same hopeful spirit in which some simple citizen of Old Rome would have "accepted the Omen."

The second point on which I wish to offer a remark is the existence (in the novel) of a person named Schomberg.

That I believe him to be true goes without saying. I am not likely to offer pinchbeck wares to my public consciously. Schomberg is an old member of my company. A very subordinate personage in Lord Jim as far back as the year 1899, *he became notably active in a certain short story of mine published in* 1902. *Here he appears in a still larger part, true to life (I hope), but also true to himself. Only, in this instance, his deeper passions come into play, and thus his grotesque psychology is completed at last.*

I don't pretend to say that this is the entire Teutonic psychology; but it is indubitably the psychology of a Teuton. My object in mentioning him here is to bring out the fact that, far from being the incarnation of recent animosities, he is the creature of my old, deep-seated and, as it were, impartial conviction.

J. C.

VICTORY

PART I

I

THERE is, as every schoolboy knows in this scientific age, a very close chemical relation between coal and diamonds. It is the reason, I believe, why some people allude to coal as "black diamonds." Both these commodities represent wealth; but coal is a much less portable form of property. There is, from that point of view, a deplorable lack of concentration in coal. Now, if a coal-mine could be put into one's waistcoat pocket—but it can't! At the same time, there is a fascination in coal, the supreme commodity of the age in which we are camped like bewildered travellers in a garish, unrestful hotel. And I suppose those two considerations, the practical and the mystical, prevented Heyst—Axel Heyst—from going away.

The Tropical Belt Coal Company went into liquidation. The world of finance is a mysterious world in which, incredible as the fact may appear, evaporation precedes liquidation. First the capital evaporates, and then the company goes into liquidation. These are very unnatural physics, but they account for the persistent inertia of Heyst, at which we "out there" used to laugh among ourselves—but not inimically. An inert body can do no harm to any one, provokes no hostility, is scarcely worth derision. It may, indeed, be in the way sometimes; but this could not be said of Axel Heyst. He was out of everybody's way, as if he were perched on the highest peak of the Himalayas, and in a sense as conspicuous. Every one in that part of the world knew of him, dwelling on his little

island. An island is but the top of a mountain. Axel Heyst, perched on it immovably, was surrounded, instead of the imponderable stormy and transparent ocean of air merging into infinity, by a tepid, shallow sea ; a passionless offshoot of the great waters which embrace the continents of this globe. His most frequent visitors were shadows, the shadows of clouds, relieving the monotony of the inanimate, brooding sunshine of the tropics. His nearest neighbour—I am speaking now of things showing some sort of animation—was an indolent volcano which smoked faintly all day with its head just above the northern horizon, and at night levelled at him, from amongst the clear stars, a dull red glow, expanding and collapsing spasmodically like the end of a gigantic cigar puffed at intermittently in the dark. Axel Heyst was also a smoker ; and when he lounged out on his veranda with his cheroot, the last thing before going to bed, he made in the night the same sort of glow and of the same size as that other one so many miles away.

In a sense, the volcano was company to him in the shades of the night—which were often too thick, one would think, to let a breath of air through. There was seldom enough wind to blow a feather along. On most evenings of the year Heyst could have sat outside with a naked candle to read one of the books left him by his late father. It was not a mean store. But he never did that. Afraid of mosquitoes, very likely. Neither was he ever tempted by the silence to address any casual remarks to the companion glow of the volcano. He was not mad. Queer chap—yes, that may have been said, and in fact was said ; but there is a tremendous difference between the two, you will allow.

On the nights of full moon the silence around Samburan —the "Round Island" of the charts—was dazzling ; and in the flood of cold light Heyst could see his immediate surroundings, which had the aspect of an abandoned settlement invaded by the jungle : vague roofs above low vegetation, broken shadows of bamboo fences in the sheen of long grass, something like an overgrown bit of road slanting among ragged thickets toward the shore only a couple of hundred yards away, with a black jetty and a

mound of some sort quite inky on its unlighted side. But the most conspicuous object was a gigantic blackboard raised on two posts and presenting to Heyst, when the moon got over that side, the white letters "T. B. C. Co." in a row at least two feet high. These were the initials of the Tropical Belt Coal Company, his employers—his late employers, to be precise.

According to the unnatural mysteries of the financial world, the T. B. C. Company's capital having evaporated in the course of two years, the company went into liquidation —forced, I believe, not voluntary. There was nothing forcible in the process, however. It was slow; and while the liquidation—in London and Amsterdam—pursued its languid course, Axel Heyst, styled in the prospectus "manager in the tropics," remained at his post on Samburan, the No. 1 coaling-station of the company.

And it was not merely a coaling-station. There was a coal-mine there, with an outcrop in the hillside less than five hundred yards from the rickety wharf and the imposing blackboard. The company's object had been to get hold of all the outcrops on tropical islands and exploit them locally. And, Lord knows, there were any amount of outcrops. It was Heyst who had located most of them in this part of the tropical belt during his rather aimless wanderings, and being a ready letter-writer had written pages and pages about them to his friends in Europe. At least, so it was said.

We doubted whether he had any visions of wealth—for himself, at any rate. What he seemed mostly concerned for was the "stride forward," as he expressed it, in the general organisation of the universe, apparently. He was heard by more than a hundred persons in the islands talking of a "great stride forward for these regions." The convinced wave of the hand which accompanied the phrase suggested tropical distances being impelled onward. In connection with the finished courtesy of his manner, it was persuasive, or at any rate silencing—for a time, at least. Nobody cared to argue with him when he talked in this strain. His earnestness could do no harm to anybody. There was no danger of any one taking seriously his dream

of tropical coal, so what was the use of hurting his feelings ?

Thus reasoned men in reputable business offices where he had his entrée as a person who came out East with letters of introduction—and modest letters of credit, too—some years before these coal-outcrops began to crop up in his playfully courteous talk. From the first there was some difficulty in making him out. He was not a traveller. A traveller arrives and departs, goes on somewhere. Heyst did not depart. I met a man once—the manager of the branch of the Oriental Banking Corporation in Malacca—to whom Heyst exclaimed, in no connection with anything in particular (it was in the billiard-room of the club) :

" I am enchanted with these islands ! "

He shot it out suddenly *à propos des bottes*, as the French say, and while chalking his cue. And perhaps it was some sort of enchantment. There are more spells than your commonplace magicians ever dreamed of.

Roughly speaking, a circle with a radius of eight hundred miles drawn round a point in North Borneo was in Heyst's case a magic circle. It just touched Manila, and he had been seen there. It just touched Saigon, and he was likewise seen there once. Perhaps these were his attempts to break out. If so, they were failures. The enchantment must have been an unbreakable one. The manager—the man who heard the exclamation—had been so impressed by the tone, fervour, rapture, what you will, or perhaps by the incongruity of it that he had related the experience to more than one person.

" Queer chap, that Swede," was his only comment ; but this is the origin of the name " Enchanted Heyst " which some fellows fastened on our man.

He also had other names. In his early years, long before he got so becomingly bald on the top, he went to present a letter of introduction to Mr. Tesman of Tesman Brothers, a Sourabaya firm—tip-top house. Well, Mr. Tesman was a kindly, benevolent old gentleman. He did not know what to make of that caller. After telling him that they wished to render his stay among the islands as pleasant as possible, and that they were ready to assist him in his plans, and so on, and after receiving Heyst's

thanks—you know the usual kind of conversation—he proceeded to query in a slow, paternal tone:

"And you are interested in—?"

"Facts," broke in Heyst in his courtly voice. "There's nothing worth knowing but facts. Hard facts! Facts alone, Mr. Tesman."

I don't know if old Tesman agreed with him or not, but he must have spoken about it, because, for a time, our man got the name of "Hard Facts." He had the singular good fortune that his sayings stuck to him and became part of his name. Thereafter he mooned about the Java Sea in some of the Tesmans' trading schooners, and then vanished, on board an Arab ship, in the direction of New Guinea. He remained so long in that outlying part of his enchanted circle that he was nearly forgotten before he swam into view again in a native proa full of Goram vagabonds, burnt black by the sun, very lean, his hair much thinned, and a portfolio of sketches under his arm. He showed these willingly, but was very reserved as to anything else. He had had an "amusing time," he said. A man who will go to New Guinea for fun—well!

Later, years afterward, when the last vestiges of youth had gone off his face and all the hair off the top of his head, and his red-gold pair of horizontal moustaches had grown to really noble proportions, a certain disreputable white man fastened upon him an epithet. Putting down with a shaking hand a long glass emptied of its contents—paid for by Heyst—he said, with that deliberate sagacity which no mere water-drinker ever attained:

"Heyst's a puffect g'n'lman. Puffect! But he's a ut-uto-utopist."

Heyst had just gone out of the place of public refreshment where this pronouncement was voiced. Utopist, eh? Upon my word, the only thing I heard him say which might have had a bearing on the point was his invitation to old McNab himself. Turning with that finished courtesy of attitude, movement, voice, which was his obvious characteristic, he had said with delicate playfulness:

"Come along and quench your thirst with us, Mr. McNab!"

Perhaps that was it. A man who could propose, even playfully, to quench old McNab's thirst must have been an utopist, a pursuer of chimæras; for of downright irony Heyst was not prodigal. And, may be, this was the reason why he was generally liked. At that epoch in his life, in the fulness of his physical development, of a broad, martial presence, with his bald head and long moustaches, he resembled the portraits of Charles XII, of adventurous memory. However, there was no reason to think that Heyst was in any way a fighting man.

II

IT was about this time that Heyst became associated with Morrison on terms about which people were in doubt. Some said he was a partner, others said he was a sort of paying guest, but the real truth of the matter was more complex. One day Heyst turned up in Timor. Why in Timor, of all places in the world, no one knows. Well, he was mooning about Delli, that highly pestilential place, possibly in search of some undiscovered facts, when he came in the street upon Morrison, who, in his way, was also an "enchanted" man. When you spoke to Morrison of going home—he was from Dorsetshire—he shuddered. He said it was dark and wet there; that it was like living with your head and shoulders in a moist gunny-bag. That was only his exaggerated style of talking. Morrison was "one of us." He was owner and master of the *Capricorn*, trading brig, and was understood to be doing well with her, except for the drawback of too much altruism. He was the dearly beloved friend of a quantity of God-forsaken villages up dark creeks and obscure bays, where he traded for "produce." He would often sail through awfully dangerous channels up to some miserable settlement, only to find a very hungry population clamorous for rice, and without so much "produce" between them as would have filled Morrison's suit-case. Amid general rejoicings, he would land the rice all the same, explain to the people

that it was an advance, that they were in debt to him now; would preach to them energy and industry, and make an elaborate note in a pocket-diary which he always carried; and this would be the end of that transaction. I don't know if Morrison thought so, but the villagers had no doubt whatever about it. Whenever a coast village sighted the brig it would begin to beat all its gongs and hoist all its streamers, and all its girls would put flowers in their hair, and the crowd would line the river bank, and Morrison would beam and glitter at all this excitement through his single eyeglass with an air of intense gratification. He was tall and lantern-jawed, and clean-shaven, and looked like a barrister who had thrown his wig to the dogs.

We used to remonstrate with him:

"You will never see any of your advances if you go on like this, Morrison."

He would put on a knowing air.

"I shall squeeze them yet some day—never you fear. And that reminds me"—pulling out his inseparable pocket-book—"there's that So-and-So village. They are pretty well off again; I may just as well squeeze them to begin with."

He would make a ferocious entry in the pocketbook:

Memo:—Squeeze the So-and-So village at the first time of calling.

Then he would stick the pencil back and snap the elastic on with inflexible finality; but he never began the squeezing. Some men grumbled at him. He was spoiling the trade. Well, perhaps to a certain extent; not much. Most of the places he traded with were unknown not only to geography but also to the traders' special lore which is transmitted by word of mouth, without ostentation, and forms the stock of mysterious local knowledge. It was hinted also that Morrison had a wife in each and every one of them, but the majority of us repulsed these innuendoes with indignation. He was a true humanitarian and rather ascetic than otherwise.

When Heyst met him in Delli, Morrison was walking along the street, his eyeglass tossed over his shoulder, his head down, with the hopeless aspect of those hardened

tramps one sees on our roads trudging from workhouse to workhouse. Being hailed across the street, he looked up with a wild, worried expression. He was really in trouble. He had come the week before into Delli, and the Portuguese authorities, on some pretence of irregularity in his papers, had inflicted a fine upon him and had arrested his brig.

Morrison never had any spare cash in hand. With his system of trading it would have been strange if he had; and all these debts entered in the pocketbook weren't good enough to raise a *millrei* on—let alone a shilling. The Portuguese officials begged him not to distress himself. They gave him a week's grace, and then proposed to sell the brig at auction. This meant ruin for Morrison; and when Heyst hailed him across the street in his usual courtly tone, the week was nearly out.

Heyst crossed over, and said with a slight bow, and in the manner of a prince addressing another prince on a private occasion:

"What an unexpected pleasure. Would you have any objection to drink something with me in that infamous wine-shop over there? The sun is really too strong to talk in the street."

The haggard Morrison followed obediently into a sombre, cool hovel which he would have disdained to enter at any other time. He was distracted. He did not know what he was doing. You could have led him over the edge of a precipice just as easily as into that wine-shop. He sat down like an automaton. He was speechless, but he saw a glass full of rough red wine before him, and emptied it. Heyst meantime, politely watchful, had taken a seat opposite.

"You are in for a bout of fever, I fear," he said sympathetically.

Poor Morrison's tongue was loosened at last.

"Fever!" he cried. "Give me fever. Give me plague. They are diseases. One gets over them. But I am being murdered. I am being murdered by the Portuguese. The gang here downed me at last among them. I am to have my throat cut the day after to-morrow."

In the face of this passion Heyst made, with his eyebrows, a slight motion of surprise which would not have been misplaced in a drawing-room. Morrison's despairing reserve had broken down. He had been wandering with a dry throat all over that miserable town of mud hovels, silent, with no soul to turn to in his distress, and positively maddened by his thoughts; and suddenly he had stumbled on a white man, figuratively and actually white—for Morrison refused to accept the racial whiteness of the Portuguese officials. He let himself go for the mere relief of violent speech, his elbows planted on the table, his eyes bloodshot, his voice nearly gone, the brim of his round pith hat shading an unshaven, livid face. His white clothes, which he had not taken off for three days, were dingy. He looked already gone to the bad, past redemption. The sight was shocking to Heyst; but he let nothing of it appear in his bearing, concealing his impression under that consummate good-society manner of his. Polite attention, what's due from one gentleman listening to another, was what he showed; and, as usual, it was catching; so that Morrison pulled himself together and finished his narrative in a conversational tone, with a man-of-the-world air.

"It's a villainous plot. Unluckily, one is helpless. That scoundrel Cousinho—Andreas, you know—has been coveting the brig for years. Naturally, I would never sell. She is not only my livelihood; she's my life. So he has hatched this pretty little plot with the chief of the customs. The sale, of course, will be a farce. There's no one here to bid. He will get the brig for a song—no, not even that—a line of a song. You have been some years now in the islands, Heyst. You know us all; you have seen how we live. Now you shall have the opportunity to see how some of us end; for it is the end, for me. I can't deceive myself any longer. You see it,—don't you?"

Morrison had pulled himself together, but one felt the snapping strain on his recovered self-possession. Heyst was beginning to say that he "could very well see all the bearings of this unfortunate—" when Morrison interrupted him jerkily.

"Upon my word, I don't know why I have been telling you all this. I suppose seeing a thoroughly white man like you made it impossible to keep my trouble to myself. Words can't do it justice; but since I've told you so much I may as well tell you more. Listen. This morning on board, in my cabin, I went down on my knees and prayed for help. I went down on my knees!"

"You are a believer, Morrison?" asked Heyst with a distinct note of respect.

"Surely I am not an infidel."

Morrison was swiftly reproachful in his answer, and there came a pause, Morrison perhaps interrogating his conscience, and Heyst preserving a mien of unperturbed, polite interest.

"I prayed like a child, of course. I believe in children praying—well, women, too, but I rather think God expects men to be more self-reliant. I don't hold with a man everlastingly bothering the Almighty with his silly troubles. It seems such cheek. Anyhow, this morning I—I have never done any harm to any God's creature knowingly—I prayed. A sudden impulse—I went flop on my knees; so you may judge—"

They were gazing earnestly into each other's eyes. Poor Morrison added, as a discouraging afterthought:

"Only this is such a God-forsaken spot."

Heyst inquired with a delicate intonation whether he might know the amount for which the brig was seized.

Morrison suppressed an oath, and named curtly a sum which was in itself so insignificant that any other person than Heyst would have exclaimed at it. And even Heyst could hardly keep incredulity out of his politely modulated voice as he asked if it was a fact that Morrison had not that amount in hand.

Morrison hadn't. He had only a little English gold, a few sovereigns, on board. He had left all his spare cash with the Tesmans, in Sourabaya, to meet certain bills which would fall due while he was away on his cruise. Anyhow, that money would not have been any more good to him than if it had been in the innermost depths of the infernal

regions. He said all this brusquely. He looked with sudden disfavour at that noble forehead, at those great martial moustaches, at the tired eyes of the man sitting opposite him. Who the devil was he? What was he, Morrison, doing there, talking like this? Morrison knew no more of Heyst than the rest of us trading in the Archipelago did. Had the Swede suddenly risen and hit him on the nose, he could not have been taken more aback than when this stranger, this nondescript wanderer, said with a little bow across the table:

"Oh! If that's the case I would be very happy if you'd allow me to be of use!"

Morrison didn't understand. This was one of those things that don't happen—unheard-of things. He had no real inkling of what it meant, till Heyst said definitely:

"I can lend you the amount."

"You have the money?" whispered Morrison. "Do you mean here, in your pocket?"

"Yes, on me. Glad to be of use."

Morrison, staring open-mouthed, groped over his shoulder for the cord of the eyeglass hanging down his back. When he found it, he stuck it in his eye hastily. It was as if he expected Heyst's usual white suit of the tropics to change into a shining garment flowing down to his toes, and a pair of great dazzling wings to sprout on the Swede's shoulders—and didn't want to miss a single detail of the transformation. But if Heyst was an angel from on high, sent in answer to prayer, he did not betray his heavenly origin by outward signs. So, instead of going on his knees, as he felt inclined to do, Morrison stretched out his hand, which Heyst grasped with formal alacrity and a polite murmur in which "Trifle—delighted—of service," could be just distinguished.

"Miracles do happen," thought the awestruck Morrison. To him, as to all of us in the islands, this wandering Heyst, who didn't toil or spin visibly, seemed the very last person to be the agent of Providence in an affair concerned with money. The fact of his turning up in Timor or anywhere else was no more wonderful than the settling of a sparrow on one's window-sill at any given moment. But that he

should carry a sum of money in his pocket seemed somehow inconceivable.

So inconceivable that as they were trudging together through the sand of the roadway to the custom-house—another mud hovel—to pay the fine, Morrison broke into a cold sweat, stopped short, and exclaimed in faltering accents:

"I say! You aren't joking, Heyst?"

"Joking!" Heyst's blue eyes went hard as he turned them on the discomposed Morrison. "In what way, may I ask?" he continued with austere politeness.

Morrison was abashed.

"Forgive me, Heyst. You must have been sent by God in answer to my prayer. But I have been nearly off my chump for three days with worry; and it suddenly struck me: 'What if it's the Devil who has sent him?'"

"I have no connection with the supernatural," said Heyst graciously, moving on. "Nobody has sent me. I just happened along."

"I know better," contradicted Morrison. "I may be unworthy, but I have been heard. I know it. I feel it. For why should you offer—"

Heyst inclined his head, as from respect for a conviction in which he could not share. But he stuck to his point by muttering that in the presence of an odious fact like this, it was natural—

Later in the day, the fine paid, and the two of them on board the brig, from which the guard had been removed, Morrison—who, besides being a gentleman, was also an honest fellow—began to talk about repayment. He knew very well his inability to lay by any sum of money. It was partly the fault of circumstances and partly of his temperament; and it would have been very difficult to apportion the responsibility between the two. Even Morrison himself could not say, while confessing to the fact. With a worried air he ascribed it to fatality.

"I don't know how it is that I've never been able to save. It's some sort of curse. There's always a bill or two to meet."

He plunged his hand into his pocket for the famous

notebook so well known in the islands, the fetish of his hopes, and fluttered the pages feverishly.

"And yet—look," he went on. "There it is—more than five thousand dollars owing. Surely that's something."

He ceased suddenly. Heyst, who had been all the time trying to look as unconcerned as he could, made reassuring noises in his throat. But Morrison was not only honest. He was honourable, too; and on this stressful day, before this amazing emissary of Providence and in the revulsion of his feelings, he made his great renunciation. He cast off the abiding illusion of his existence.

"No. No. They are no good. I'll never be able to squeeze them. Never. I've been saying for years I would; but I give it up. I never really believed I could. Don't reckon on that, Heyst. I have robbed you."

Poor Morrison actually laid his head on the cabin table, and remained in that crushed attitude while Heyst talked to him soothingly with the utmost courtesy. The Swede was as much distressed as Morrison; for he understood the other's feelings perfectly. No decent feeling was ever scorned by Heyst. But he was incapable of outward cordiality of manner, and he felt acutely his defect. Consummate politeness is not the right tonic for an emotional collapse. They must have had, both of them, a fairly painful time of it in the cabin of the brig. In the end Morrison, casting desperately for an idea in the blackness of his despondency, hit upon the notion of inviting Heyst to travel with him in his brig and have a share in his trading ventures up to the amount of his loan.

It is characteristic of Heyst's unattached, floating existence that he was in a position to accept this proposal. There is no reason to think that he wanted particularly just then to go poking aboard the brig into all the holes and corners of the Archipelago where Morrison picked up most of his trade. Far from it; but he would have consented to almost any arrangement in order to put an end to the harrowing scene in the cabin. There was at once a great transformation act: Morrison raising his diminished head and sticking the glass in his eye to look

affectionately at Heyst, a bottle being uncorked, and so on. It was agreed that nothing should be said to any one of this transaction. Morrison, you understand, was not proud of the episode, and he was afraid of being unmercifully chaffed.

"An old bird like me! To let myself be trapped by those damned Portuguese rascals! I should never hear the last of it. We must keep it dark."

From quite other motives, among which his native delicacy was the principal, Heyst was even more anxious to bind himself to silence. A gentleman would naturally shrink from the part of heavenly messenger that Morrison would force upon him. It made Heyst uncomfortable, as it was. And perhaps he did not care that it should be known that he had some means, whatever they might have been—sufficient, at any rate, to enable him to lend money to people. These two had a duet down there, like conspirators in a comic opera, of "Sh—ssh, shssh! Secrecy! Secrecy!" It must have been funny, because they were very serious about it.

And for a time the conspiracy was successful in so far that we all concluded that Heyst was boarding with the good-natured—some said: sponging on the imbecile—Morrison, in his brig. But you know how it is with all such mysteries. There is always a leak somewhere. Morrison himself, not a perfect vessel by any means, was bursting with gratitude, and under the stress he must have let out something vague—enough to give the island gossip a chance. And you know how kindly the world is in its comments on what it does not understand. A rumour sprang out that Heyst, having obtained some mysterious hold on Morrison, had fastened himself on him and was sucking him dry. Those who had traced these mutters back to their origin were very careful not to believe them. The originator, it seems, was a certain Schomberg, a big, manly, bearded creature of the Teutonic persuasion, with an ungovernable tongue which surely must have worked on a pivot. Whether he was a Lieutenant of the Reserve, as he declared, I don't know. Out there he was by profession a hotel-keeper, first in

Bangkok, then somewhere else, and ultimately in Sourabaya. He dragged after him up and down that section of the tropical belt a silent, frightened little woman with long ringlets, who smiled at one stupidly, showing a blue tooth. I don't know why so many of us patronised his various establishments. He was a noxious ass, and he satisfied his lust for silly gossip at the cost of his customers. It was he who, one evening, as Morrison and Heyst went past the hotel—they were not his regular patrons—whispered mysteriously to the mixed company assembled on the veranda:

"The spider and the fly just gone by, gentlemen." Then, very important and confidential, his thick paw at the side of his mouth: "We are among ourselves; well, gentlemen, all I can say is, don't you ever get mixed up with that Swede. Don't you ever get caught in his web."

III

HUMAN nature being what it is, having a silly side to it as well as a mean side, there were not a few who pretended to be indignant on no better authority than a general propensity to believe every evil report; and a good many others who found it simply funny to call Heyst the Spider—behind his back, of course. He was as serenely unconscious of this as of his several other nicknames. But soon people found other things to say of Heyst; not long afterward he came very much to the fore in larger affairs. He blossomed out into something definite. He filled the public eye as the manager on the spot of the Tropical Belt Coal Company, with offices in London and Amsterdam, and other things about it that sounded and looked grandiose. The offices in the two capitals may have consisted—and probably did—of one room in each; but at that distance, out East there, all this had an air. We were more puzzled than dazzled, it is true; but even the most sober-minded among us began to think that there was something in it. The Tesmans appointed agents, a

contract for Government mail-boats secured, the era of steam beginning for the islands—a great stride forward—Heyst's stride!

And all this sprang from the meeting of the cornered Morrison and of the wandering Heyst, which may or may not have been the direct outcome of a prayer. Morrison was not an imbecile, but he seemed to have got himself into a state of remarkable haziness as to his exact position towards Heyst. For, if Heyst had been sent with money in his pocket by a direct decree of the Almighty in answer to Morrison's prayer then there was no reason for special gratitude, since obviously he could not help himself. But Morrison believed both in the efficacy of prayer and in the infinite goodness of Heyst. He thanked God with awed sincerity for His mercy, and could not thank Heyst enough for the service rendered as between man and man. In this (highly creditable) tangle of strong feelings Morrison's gratitude insisted on Heyst's partnership in the great discovery. Ultimately we heard that Morrison had gone home through the Suez Canal in order to push the magnificent coal idea personally in London. He parted from his brig and disappeared from our ken; but we heard that he had written a letter or letters to Heyst, saying that London was cold and gloomy; that he did not like either the men or things, that he was "as lonely as a crow in a strange country." In truth, he pined after the *Capricorn*—I don't mean only the tropic; I mean the ship too. Finally he went into Dorsetshire to see his people, caught a bad cold, and died with extraordinary precipitation in the bosom of his appalled family. Whether his exertions in the City of London had enfeebled his vitality I don't know; but I believe it was this visit which put life into the coal idea. Be it as it may, the Tropical Belt Coal Company was born very shortly after Morrison, the victim of gratitude and his native climate, had gone to join his forefathers in a Dorsetshire churchyard.

Heyst was immensely shocked. He got the news in the Moluccas through the Tesmans, and then disappeared for a time. It appears that he stayed with a Dutch government doctor in Amboyna, a friend of his who looked

after him for a bit in his bungalow. He became visible again rather suddenly, his eyes sunk in his head, and with a sort of guarded attitude, as if afraid some one would reproach him with the death of Morrison.

Naïve Heyst! As if anybody would. . . . Nobody amongst us had any interest in men who went home. They were all right; they did not count any more. Going to Europe was nearly as final as going to Heaven. It removed a man from the world of hazard and adventure.

As a matter of fact, many of us did not hear of this death till months afterward—from Schomberg, who disliked Heyst gratuitously and made up a piece of sinister whispered gossip:

"That's what comes of having anything to do with that fellow. He squeezes you dry like a lemon, then chucks you out—sends you home to die. Take warning by Morrison."

Of course, we laughed at the innkeeper's suggestions of black mystery. Several of us heard that Heyst was prepared to go to Europe himself, to push on his coal enterprise personally; but he never went. It wasn't necessary. The company was formed without him, and his nomination of manager in the tropics came out to him by post.

From the first he had selected Samburan, or Round Island, for the central station. Some copies of the prospectus issued in Europe, having found their way out East, were passed from hand to hand. We greatly admired the map which accompanied them for the edification of the shareholders. On it Samburan was represented as the central spot of the Eastern Hemisphere, with its name engraved in enormous capitals. Heavy lines radiated from it in all directions through the tropics, figuring a mysterious and effective star—lines of influence or lines of distance, or something of that sort. Company promoters have an imagination of their own. There's no more romantic temperament on earth than the temperament of a company promoter. Engineers came out, coolies were imported, bungalows were put up on Samburan, a gallery driven into the hillside, and actually some coal got out.

These manifestations shook the soberest minds. For

a time everybody in the islands was talking of the Tropical Belt Coal, and even those who smiled quietly to themselves were only hiding their uneasiness. "Oh, yes; it had come, and anybody could see what would be the consequences—the end of the individual trader, smothered under a great invasion of steamers. We could not afford to buy steamers. Not we. And Heyst was the manager.

"You know, Heyst, enchanted Heyst."

"Oh come! He has been no better than a loafer around here as far back as any of us can remember."

"Yes, said he was looking for facts. Well, he's got hold of one that will do for all of us," commented a bitter voice.

"That's what they call development—and be hanged to it!" muttered another.

Never was Heyst talked about so much in the tropical belt before.

"Isn't he a Swedish baron or something?"

"He, a baron? Get along with you!"

For my part I haven't the slightest doubt that he was While he was still drifting amongst the islands, enigmatical and disregarded like an insignificant ghost, he told me so himself on a certain occasion. It was a long time before he materialised in this alarming way into the destroyer of our little industry—Heyst the Enemy.

It became the fashion with a good many to speak of Heyst as the Enemy. He was very concrete, very visible now. He was rushing all over the Archipelago, jumping in and out of local mail-packets as if they had been tramcars, here, there and everywhere—organising with all his might. This was no mooning about. This was business. And this sudden display of purposeful energy shook the incredulity of the most sceptical more than any scientific demonstration of the value of these coal-outcrops could have done. It was impressive. Schomberg was the only one who resisted the infection. Big, manly in a portly style, and profusely bearded, with a glass of beer in his thick paw, he would approach some table where the topic of the hour was being discussed, would listen for a moment, and then come out with his invariable declaration:

"All this is very well, gentlemen; but he can't throw any of his coal-dust in my eyes. There's nothing in it. Why, there can't be anything in it. A fellow like that for manager? Phoo!"

Was it the clairvoyance of imbecile hatred, or mere stupid tenacity of opinion, which ends sometimes by scoring against the world in a most astonishing manner? Most of us can remember instances of triumphant folly; and that ass Schomberg triumphed. The T. B. C. Co. went into liquidation, as I began by telling you. The Tesmans washed their hands of it. The Government cancelled those famous contracts. The talk died out, and presently it was remarked here and there that Heyst had faded completely away. He had become invisible, as in those early days when he used to make a bolt clear out of sight in his attempts to break away from the enchantment of "these isles," either in the direction of New Guinea or in the direction of Saigon—to cannibals or to cafés. The enchanted Heyst! Had he at last broken the spell? Had he died? We were too indifferent to wonder over-much. You see we had on the whole liked him well enough. And liking is not sufficient to keep going the interest one takes in a human being. With hatred, apparently, it is otherwise. Schomberg couldn't forget Heyst. The keen, manly Teutonic creature was a good hater. A fool often is.

"Good evening, gentlemen. Have you got everything you want? So! Good! You see? What was I always telling you? Aha! There was nothing in it. I knew it. But what I would like to know is what became of that—Swede."

He put a stress on the word Swede as if it meant scoundrel. He detested Scandinavians generally. Why? Goodness only knows. A fool like that is unfathomable. He continued:

"It's five months or more since I have spoken to anybody who has seen him."

As I have said, we were not much interested; but Schomberg, of course, could not understand that. He was grotesquely dense. Whenever three people came

together in his hotel, he took good care that Heyst should be with them.

"I hope the fellow did not go and drown himself," he would add with a comical earnestness that ought to have made us shudder; only our crowd was superficial, and did not apprehend the psychology of this pious hope.

"Why? Heyst isn't in debt to you for drinks, is he?" somebody asked him once with shallow scorn.

"Drinks! Oh dear no!"

The innkeeper was not mercenary. Teutonic temperament seldom is. But he put on a sinister expression to tell us that Heyst had not paid perhaps three visits altogether to his "establishment." This was Heyst's crime; for which Schomberg wished him nothing less than a long and tormented existence. Observe the Teutonic sense of proportion and nice forgiving temper.

At last, one afternoon, Schomberg was seen approaching a group of his customers. He was obviously in high glee. He squared his manly chest with great importance.

"Gentlemen, I have news of him. Who? Why, that Swede. He is still on Samburan. He's never been away from it. The company is gone, the engineers are gone, the clerks are gone, the coolies are gone, everything's gone; but there he sticks. Captain Davidson, coming by from the westward, saw him with his own eyes. Something white on the wharf; so he steamed in and went ashore in a small boat. Heyst, right enough. Put a book into his pocket, always very polite. Been strolling on the wharf and reading. 'I remain in possession here,' he told Captain Davidson. What I want to know is what he gets to eat there. A piece of dried fish now and then—what? That's coming down pretty low for a man who turned up his nose at my table d'hôte!"

He winked with immense malice. A bell started ringing, and he led the way to the dining-room as if into a temple, very grave, with the air of a benefactor of mankind. His ambition was to feed it at a profitable price, and his delight was to talk of it behind its back. It was very characteristic of him to gloat over the idea of Heyst having nothing decent to eat.

IV

A FEW of us who were sufficiently interested went to Davidson for details. These were not many. He told us that he passed to the north of Samburan on purpose to see what was going on. At first, it looked as if that side of the island had been altogether abandoned. This was what he expected. Presently, above the dense mass of vegetation that Samburan presents to view, he saw the head of the flagstaff without a flag. Then, while steaming across the slight indentation which for a time was known officially as Black Diamond Bay, he made out with his glass the white figure on the coaling-wharf. It could be no one but Heyst.

"I thought for certain he wanted to be taken off, so I steamed in. He made no signs. However, I lowered a boat. I could not see another living being anywhere. Yes. He had a book in his hand. He looked exactly as we have always seen him—very neat, white shoes, cork helmet. He explained to me that he had always had a taste for solitude. It was the first I ever heard of it, I told him. He only smiled. What could I say? He isn't the sort of man one can speak familiarly to. There's something in him. One doesn't care to.

"'But what's the object? Are you thinking of keeping possession of the mine?' I asked him.

"'Something of the sort,' he says. 'I am keeping hold.'

"'But all this is as dead as Julius Cæsar,' I cried. 'In fact, you have nothing worth holding on to, Heyst.'

"'Oh, I am done with facts,' says he, putting his hand to his helmet sharply with one of his short bows."

Thus dismissed, Davidson went on board his ship, swung her out, and as he was steaming away he watched from the bridge Heyst walking shoreward along the wharf. He marched into the long grass and vanished—all but the top of his white cork helmet, which seemed to swim in a green sea. Then that too disappeared, as if it had sunk into the living depths of the tropical vegetation, which is more jealous of men's conquests than the ocean, and which

was about to close over the last vestiges of the liquidated Tropical Belt Coal Company—A. Heyst, manager in the East.

Davidson, a good, simple fellow in his way, was strangely affected. It is to be noted that he knew very little of Heyst. He was one of those whom Heyst's finished courtesy of attitude and intonation most strongly disconcerted. He himself was a fellow of fine feeling, I think, though of course he had no more polish than the rest of us. We were naturally a hail-fellow-well-met crowd, with standards of our own—no worse, I daresay, than other people's; but polish was not one of them. Davidson's fineness was real enough to alter the course of the steamer he commanded. Instead of passing to the south of Samburan, he made it his practice to take the passage along the north shore, within about a mile of the wharf.

"He can see us if he likes to see us," remarked Davidson. Then he had an after-thought: "I say! I hope he won't think I am intruding, eh?"

We reassured him on the point of correct behaviour. The sea is open to all.

This slight deviation added some ten miles to Davidson's round trip, but as that was sixteen hundred miles it did not matter much.

"I have told my owner of it," said the conscientious commander of the *Sissie*.

His owner had a face like an ancient lemon. He was small and wizened—which was strange, because generally a Chinaman, as he grows in prosperity, puts on inches of girth and stature. To serve a Chinese firm is not so bad. Once they become convinced you deal straight by them, their confidence becomes unlimited. You can do no wrong. So Davidson's old Chinaman squeaked hurriedly:

"All right, all right, all right. You do what you like, captain."

And there was an end of the matter; not altogether, though. From time to time the Chinaman used to ask Davidson about the white man. He was still there, eh?

"I never see him," Davidson had to confess to his owner, who would peer at him silently through round,

horn-rimmed spectacles, several sizes too large for his little old face. "I never see him."

To me, on occasions, he would say:

"I haven't a doubt he's there. He hides. It's very unpleasant." Davidson was a little vexed with Heyst. "Funny thing," he went on. "Of all the people I speak to, nobody ever asks after him but that Chinaman of mine—and Schomberg," he added after a while.

Yes, Schomberg, of course. He was asking everybody about everything, and arranging the information into the most scandalous shape his imagination could invent. From time to time he would step up, his blinking, cushioned eyes, his thick lips, his very chestnut beard, looking full of malice.

"'Evening, gentlemen. Have you got all you want? So! Good! Well, I am told the jungle has choked the very sheds in Black Diamond Bay. Fact. He's a hermit in the wilderness now. But what can this manager get to eat there? It beats me."

Sometimes a stranger would inquire with natural curiosity:

"Who? What manager?"

"Oh, a certain Swede,"—with a sinister emphasis, as if he were saying "a certain brigand."—"Well known here. He's turned hermit from shame. That's what the devil does when he's found out."

Hermit. This was the latest of the more or less witty labels applied to Heyst during his aimless pilgrimage in this section of the tropical belt, where the inane clacking of Schomberg's tongue vexed our ears.

But apparently Heyst was not a hermit by temperament. The sight of his kind was not invincibly odious to him. We must believe this, since for some reason or other he did come out from his retreat for a while. Perhaps it was only to see whether there were any letters for him at the Tesmans. I don't know. No one knows. But this reappearance shows that his detachment from the world was not complete. And incompleteness of any sort leads to trouble. Axel Heyst ought not to have cared for his letters—or whatever it was that brought him out after

something more than a year and a half in Samburan. But it was of no use. He had not the hermit's vocation! That was the trouble, it seems.

Be this as it may, he suddenly reappeared in the world, broad chest, bald forehead, long moustaches, polite manner, and all—the complete Heyst, even to the kindly, sunken eyes on which there still rested the shadow of Morrison's death. Naturally, it was Davidson who had given him a lift out of his forsaken island. There were no other opportunities, unless some native craft were passing by—a very remote and unsatisfactory chance to wait for. Yes, he came out with Davidson, to whom he volunteered the statement that it was only for a short time—a few days, no more. He meant to go back to Samburan.

Davidson expressing his horror and incredulity of such foolishness, Heyst explained that when the company came into being he had his few belongings sent out from Europe.

To Davidson, as to any of us, the idea of Heyst, the wandering, drifting, unattached Heyst, having any belongings of the sort that can furnish a house was startlingly novel. It was grotesquely fantastic. It was like a bird owning real property.

"Belongings? Do you mean chairs and tables?" Davidson asked with unconcealed astonishment.

Heyst did mean that. "My poor father died in London. It has been all stored there ever since," he explained.

"For all these years?" exclaimed Davidson, thinking how long we all had known Heyst flitting from tree to tree in a wilderness.

"Even longer," said Heyst, who had understood very well.

This seemed to imply that he had been wandering before he came under our observation. In what regions? At what early age? Mystery. Perhaps he was a bird that had never had a nest.

"I left school early," he remarked once to Davidson, on the passage. "It was in England. A very good school. I was not a shining success there."

The confessions of Heyst. Not one of us—with the probable exception of Morrison who was dead—had ever

heard so much of his history. It looks as if the experience of hermit life had the power to loosen one's tongue, doesn't it ?

During that memorable passage, in the *Sissie*, which took about two days, he volunteered other hints—for you could not call it information—about his history. And Davidson was interested. He was interested not because the hints were exciting but because of that innate curiosity about our fellows which is a trait of human nature. Davidson's existence too, running the *Sissie* along the Java Sea and back again, was distinctly monotonous and, in a sense, lonely. He never had any sort of company on board. Native deck-passengers in plenty, of course, but never a white man, so the presence of Heyst for two days must have been a godsend. Davidson was telling us all about it afterward. Heyst said that his father had written a lot of books. He was a philosopher.

" Seems to me he must have been something of a crank, too," was Davidson's comment. " Apparently he had quarrelled with his people in Sweden. Just the sort of father you would expect Heyst to have. Isn't he a bit of a crank himself ? He told me that directly his father died he lit out into the wide world on his own, and had been on the move till he fetched up against this famous coal business. Fits the son of his father somehow, don't you think ? "

For the rest, Heyst was as polite as ever. He offered to pay for his passage ; but when Davidson refused to hear of it he seized him heartily by the hand, gave one of his courtly bows, and declared that he was touched by his friendly proceedings.

" I am not alluding to this trifling amount which you decline to take," he went on, giving a shake to Davidson's hand. " But I am touched by your humanity." Another shake. " Believe me, I am profoundly aware of having been an object of it." Final shake of the hand. All this meant that Heyst understood in a proper sense the little *Sissie's* periodical appearance in sight of his hermitage.

" He's a genuine gentleman," Davidson said to us. " I was really sorry when he went ashore."

We asked him where he had left Heyst.

"Why, in Sourabaya—where else?"

The Tesmans had their principal counting-house in Sourabaya. There had long existed a connection between Heyst and the Tesmans. The incongruity of a hermit having agents did not strike us, nor yet the absurdity of a forgotten, cast-off, derelict manager of a wrecked, collapsed, vanished enterprise, having business to attend to. We said Sourabaya, of course, and took it for granted that he would stay with one of the Tesmans. One of us even wondered what sort of reception he would get; for it was known that Julius Tesman was unreasonably bitter about the Tropical Belt Coal fiasco. But Davidson set us right. It was nothing of the kind. Heyst went to stay in Schomberg's hotel, going ashore in the hotel launch. Not that Schomberg would think of sending his launch alongside a mere trader like the *Sissie*. But she had been meeting a coasting mail-packet, and had been signalled to. Schomberg himself was steering her.

"You should have seen Schomberg's eyes bulge out when Heyst jumped in with an ancient brown leather bag!" said Davidson. "He pretended not to know who it was—at first, anyway. I didn't go ashore with them. We didn't stay more than a couple of hours altogether. Landed two thousand cocoanuts and cleared out. I have agreed to pick him up again on my next trip in twenty days' time."

V

DAVIDSON happened to be two days late on his return trip; no great matter, certainly, but he made a point of going ashore at once, during the hottest hour of the afternoon, to look for Heyst. Schomberg's hotel stood back in an extensive enclosure containing a garden, some large trees, and, under their spreading boughs, a detached "hall available for concerts and other performances," as Schomberg worded it in his advertisements. Torn and fluttering bills, intimating in heavy red capitals

"Concerts every night," were stuck on the brick pillars on each side of the gateway.

The walk had been long and confoundedly sunny. Davidson stood wiping his wet neck and face on what Schomberg called "the piazza." Several doors opened on to it, but all the screens were down. Not a soul was in sight, not even a China boy—nothing but a lot of painted iron chairs and tables. Solitude, shade and gloomy silence—and a faint, treacherous breeze which came from under the trees and quite unexpectedly caused the melting Davidson to shiver slightly—the little shiver of the tropics which in Sourabaya, especially, often means fever and the hospital to the incautious white man.

The prudent Davidson sought shelter in the nearest darkened room. In the artificial dusk, beyond the levels of shrouded billiard-tables, a white form heaved up from two chairs on which it had been extended. The middle of the day, table d'hôte tiffin once over, was Schomberg's easy time. He lounged out, portly, deliberate, on the defensive, the great fair beard like a cuirass over his manly chest. He did not like Davidson, never a very faithful client of his. He hit a bell on one of the tables as he went by, and asked in a distant, Officer-of-the-Reserve manner:

"You desire?"

The good Davidson, still sponging his wet neck, declared with simplicity that he had come to fetch away Heyst, as agreed.

"Not here!"

A Chinaman appeared in response to the bell. Schomberg turned to him very severely:

"Take the gentleman's order."

Davidson had to be going. Couldn't wait—only begged that Heyst should be informed that the *Sissie* would leave at midnight.

"Not—here, I am telling you!"

Davidson slapped his thigh in concern.

"Dear me! Hospital, I suppose." A natural enough surmise in a very feverish locality.

The Lieutenant of the Reserve only pursed up his

mouth and raised his eyebrows without looking at him. It might have meant anything, but Davidson dismissed the hospital idea with confidence. However, he had to get hold of Heyst between this and midnight.

"He has been staying here?" he asked.

"Yes, he was staying here."

"Can you tell me where he is now?" Davidson went on placidly. Within himself he was beginning to grow anxious, having developed the affection of a self-appointed protector toward Heyst. The answer he got was:

"Can't tell. It's none of my business," accompanied by majestic oscillations of the hotel-keeper's head, hinting at some awful mystery.

Davidson was placidity itself. It was his nature. He did not betray his sentiments, which were not favourable to Schomberg.

"I am sure to find out at the Tesmans' office," he thought. But it was a very hot hour, and if Heyst was down at the port he would have learned already that the *Sissie* was in. It was even possible that Heyst had already gone on board, where he could enjoy a coolness denied to the town. Davidson, being stout, was much preoccupied with coolness and inclined to immobility. He lingered awhile, as if irresolute. Schomberg, at the door, looking out, affected perfect indifference. He could not keep it up, though. Suddenly he turned inward and asked with brusque rage:

"You wanted to see him?"

"Why, yes," said Davidson. "We agreed to meet—"

"Don't you bother. He doesn't care about that now."

"Doesn't he?"

"Well, you can judge for yourself. He isn't here, is he? You take my word for it. Don't you bother about him. I am advising you as a friend."

"Thank you," said Davidson, inwardly startled at the savage tone. "I think I will sit down for a moment and have a drink, after all."

This was not what Schomberg had expected to hear. He called brutally:

"Boy!"

The Chinaman approached, and after referring him to the white man by a nod the hotel-keeper departed, muttering to himself. Davidson heard him gnash his teeth as he went.

Davidson sat alone with the billiard-tables as if there had been not a soul staying in the hotel. His placidity was so genuine that he was not unduly fretting himself over the absence of Heyst or the mysterious manners Schomberg had treated him to. He was considering these things in his own fairly shrewd way. Something had happened; and he was loath to go away to investigate, being restrained by a presentiment that somehow enlightenment would come to him there. A poster of "Concerts Every Evening," like those on the gate, but in a good state of preservation, hung on the wall fronting him. He looked at it idly and was struck by the fact—then not so very common—that it was a ladies' orchestra; "Zangiacomo's eastern tour—eighteen performers." The poster stated that they had had the honour of playing their select repertoire before various colonial excellencies, also before pashas, sheiks, chiefs, H.H. the Sultan of Mascate; etc., etc..

Davidson felt sorry for the eighteen lady-performers. He knew what that sort of life was like, the sordid conditions and brutal incidents of such tours led by such Zangiacomos who often were anything but musicians by profession. While he was staring at the poster, a door somewhere at his back opened, and a woman came in who was looked upon as Schomberg's wife, no doubt with truth. As somebody remarked cynically once, she was too unattractive to be anything else. The opinion that he treated her abominably was based on her frightened expression. Davidson lifted his hat to her. Mrs. Schomberg gave him an inclination of her sallow head and incontinently sat down behind a sort of raised counter, facing the door, with a mirror and rows of bottles at her back. Her hair was very elaborately done with two ringlets on the left side of her scraggy neck; her dress was of silk, and she had come on duty for the afternoon. For some reason or other Schomberg exacted this from her,

though she added nothing to the fascinations of the place. She sat there in the smoke and noise, like an enthroned idol, smiling stupidly over the billiards from time to time, speaking to no one, and no one speaking to her. Schomberg himself took no more interest in her than may be implied in a sudden and totally unmotived scowl. Otherwise the very Chinamen ignored her existence.

She had interrupted Davidson in his reflections. Being alone with her, her silence and open-eyed immobility made him uncomfortable. He was easily sorry for people. It seemed rude not to take any notice of her. He said, in allusion to the poster: "Are you having these people in the house?"

She was so unused to being addressed by customers that at the sound of his voice she jumped in her seat. Davidson was telling us afterward that she jumped exactly like a figure made of wood, without losing her rigid immobility. She did not even move her eyes; but she answered him freely, though her very lips seemed made of wood.

"They stayed here over a month. They are gone now. They played every evening."

"Pretty good, were they?"

To this she said nothing; and as she kept on staring fixedly in front of her, her silence disconcerted Davidson. It looked as if she had not heard him—which was impossible. Perhaps she drew the line of speech at the expression of opinions. Schomberg might have trained her, for domestic reasons, to keep them to herself. But Davidson felt in honour obliged to converse; so he said, putting his own interpretation on this surprising silence:

"I see—not much account. Such bands hardly ever are. An Italian lot, Mrs. Schomberg, to judge by the name of the boss?"

She shook her head negatively.

"No. He is a German really; only he dyes his hair and beard black for business. Zangiacomo is his business name."

"That's a curious fact," said Davidson. His head being full of Heyst, it occurred to him that she might be aware of other facts. This was a very amazing discovery

to any one who looked at Mrs. Schomberg. Nobody had ever suspected her of having a mind, I mean even a little of it. I mean any at all. One was inclined to think of her as an It—an automaton, a very plain dummy, with an arrangement for bowing the head at times and smiling stupidly now and then. Davidson viewed her profile with a flattened nose, a hollow cheek and one staring, unwinking, goggle eye. He asked himself: Did that speak just now? Will it speak again? It was as exciting, for the mere wonder of it, as trying to converse with a mechanism. A smile played about the fat features of Davidson; the smile of a man making an amusing experiment. He spoke again to her:

"But the other members of that orchestra were real Italians, were they not?"

Of course, he didn't care. He wanted to see whether the mechanism would work again. It did. It said they were not. They were of all sorts, apparently. It paused, with the one goggle eye immovably gazing down the whole length of the room and through the door opening on to the "piazza." It paused, then went on in the same low pitch:

"There was even one English girl."

"Poor devil!" said Davidson. "I suppose these women are not much better than slaves really. Was that fellow with the dyed beard decent in his way?"

The mechanism remained silent. The sympathetic soul of Davidson drew its own conclusions.

"Beastly life for these women!" he said. "When you say an English girl, Mrs. Schomberg, do you really mean a young girl? Some of these orchestra girls are no chicks."

"Young enough," came the low voice out of Mrs. Schomberg's unmoved physiognomy.

Davidson, encouraged, remarked that he was sorry for her. He was easily sorry for people.

"Where did they go to from here?" he asked.

"She did not go with them. She ran away."

This was the pronouncement Davidson obtained next. It introduced a new sort of interest.

"Well! Well!" he exclaimed placidly; and then,

with the air of a man who knows life: "Who with?" he inquired with assurance.

Mrs. Schomberg's immobility gave her an appearance of listening intently. Perhaps she was really listening; but Schomberg must have been finishing his sleep in some distant part of the house. The silence was profound, and lasted long enough to become startling. Then, enthroned above Davidson, she whispered at last:

"That friend of yours."

"Oh, you know I am here looking for a friend," said Davidson hopefully. "Won't you tell me—"

"I've told you."

"Eh?"

A mist seemed to roll away from before Davidson's eyes, disclosing something he could not believe.

"You can't mean it!" he cried. "He's not the man for it." But the last words came out in a faint voice. Mrs. Schomberg never moved her head the least bit. Davidson, after the shock which made him sit up, went slack all over.

"Heyst! Such a perfect gentleman!" he exclaimed weakly.

Mrs. Schomberg did not seem to have heard him. This startling fact did not tally somehow with the idea Davidson had of Heyst. He never talked of women, he never seemed to think of them, or to remember that they existed; and then all at once—like this! Running off with a casual orchestra girl!

"You might have knocked me down with a feather," Davidson told us some time afterward.

By then he was taking an indulgent view of both the parties to that amazing transaction. First of all, on reflection, he was by no means certain that it prevented Heyst from being a perfect gentleman, as before. He confronted our open grins or quiet smiles with a serious round face. Heyst had taken the girl away to Samburan; and that was no joking matter. The loneliness, the ruins of the spot, had impressed Davidson's simple soul They were incompatible with the frivolous comments of people who had not seen it. That black jetty, sticking out of

the jungle into the empty sea ; these roof-ridges of deserted houses peeping dismally above the long grass ! Ough ! The gigantic and funereal blackboard sign of the Tropical Belt Coal Company, still emerging from a wild growth of bushes like an inscription stuck above a grave figured by the tall heap of unsold coal at the shore end of the wharf, added to the general desolation.

Thus the sensitive Davidson. The girl must have been miserable indeed to follow a strange man to such a spot. Heyst had, no doubt, told her the truth, He was a gentleman. But no words could do justice to the conditions of life on Samburan. A desert island was nothing to it. Moreover, when you were cast away on a desert island—why, you could not help yourself ; but to expect a fiddle-playing girl out of an ambulant ladies' orchestra to remain content there for a day, for one single day, was inconceivable. She would be frightened at the first sight of it. She would scream.

The capacity for sympathy in these stout, placid men ! Davidson was stirred to the depths ; and it was easy to see that it was about Heyst that he was concerned. We asked him if he had passed that way lately.

" Oh, yes. I always do—about half a mile off."

" Seen anybody about ? "

" No, not a soul. Not a shadow."

" Did you blow your whistle ? "

" Blow the whistle ? You think I would do such a thing ? "

He rejected the mere possibility of such an unwarrantable intrusion. Wonderfully delicate fellow, Davidson !

" Well, but how do you know that they are there ? " he was naturally asked.

Heyst had entrusted Mrs. Schomberg with a message for Davidson—a few lines in pencil on a scrap of crumpled paper. It was to the effect that an unforeseen necessity was driving him away before the appointed time. He begged Davidson's indulgence for the apparent discourtesy. The woman of the house—meaning Mrs. Schomberg—would give him the facts, though unable to explain them, of course.

"What was there to explain?" wondered Davidson dubiously. "He took a fancy to that fiddle-playing girl, and—"

"And she to him, apparently," I suggested.

"Wonderfully quick work," reflected Davidson. "What do you think will come of it?"

"Repentance, I should say. But how is it that Mrs. Schomberg has been selected for a confidante?"

For indeed a waxwork figure would have seemed more useful than that woman whom we all were accustomed to see sitting elevated above the two billiard-tables—without expression, without movement, without voice, without sight.

"Why, she helped the girl to bolt," said Davidson, turning at me his innocent eyes, rounded by the state of constant amazement in which this affair had left him, like those shocks of terror or sorrow which sometimes leave their victim afflicted by nervous trembling. It looked as though he would never get over it.

"Mrs. Schomberg jerked Heyst's note, twisted like a pipe-light, into my lap while I sat there unsuspecting," Davidson went on. "Directly I had recovered my senses, I asked her what on earth she had to do with it that Heyst should leave it with her. And then, behaving like a painted image rather than a live woman, she whispered, just loud enough for me to hear:

"'I helped them. I got her things together, tied them up in my own shawl, and threw them into the compound out of a back window. I did it.'

"That woman that you would say hadn't the pluck to lift her little finger!" marvelled Davidson in his quiet, slightly panting voice. "What do you think of that?"

I thought she must have had some interest of her own to serve. She was too lifeless to be suspected of impulsive compassion. It was impossible to think that Heyst had bribed her. Whatever means he had, he had not the means to do that. Or could it be that she was moved by that disinterested passion for delivering a woman to a man which in respectable spheres is called matchmaking?—a highly irregular example of it!

"It must have been a very small bundle," remarked Davidson further.

"I imagine the girl must have been specially attractive," I said.

"I don't know. She was miserable. I don't suppose it was more than a little linen and a couple of these white frocks they wear on the platform."

Davidson pursued his own train of thought. He supposed that such a thing had never been heard of in the history of the tropics. For where could you find any one to steal a girl out of an orchestra? No doubt fellows here and there took a fancy to some pretty one—but it was not for running away with her. Oh dear no! It needed a lunatic like Heyst.

"Only think what it means," wheezed Davidson, imaginative under his invincible placidity. "Just only try to think! Brooding alone on Samburan has upset his brain. He never stopped to consider, or he couldn't have done it. No sane man. . . . How is a thing like that to go on? What's he going to do with her in the end? It's madness."

"You say that he's mad. Schomberg tells us that he must be starving on his island; so he may end yet by eating her," I suggested.

Mrs. Schomberg had had no time to enter into details, Davidson told us. Indeed, the wonder was that they had been left alone so long. The drowsy afternoon was slipping by. Footsteps and voices resounded on the veranda—I beg pardon, the piazza; the scraping of chairs, the ping of a smitten bell. Customers were turning up. Mrs. Schomberg was begging Davidson hurriedly, but without looking at him, to say nothing to any one, when on a half-uttered word her nervous whisper was cut short. Through a small inner door Schomberg came in, his hair brushed, his beard combed neatly, but his eyelids still heavy from his nap. He looked with suspicion at Davidson, and even glanced at his wife; but he was baffled by the natural placidity of the one and the acquired habit of immobility in the other.

"Have you sent out the drinks?" he asked surlily.

She did not open her lips, because just then the head boy appeared with a loaded tray on his way out. Schomberg went to the door and greeted the customers outside, but did not join them. He remained blocking half the doorway, with his back to the room, and was still there when Davidson, after sitting still for a while, rose to go. At the noise he made Schomberg turned his head, watched him lift his hat to Mrs. Schomberg and receive her wooden bow accompanied by a stupid grin, and then looked away. He was loftily dignified. Davidson stopped at the door, deep in his simplicity.

"I am sorry you won't tell me anything about my friend's absence," he said. "My friend Heyst, you know. I suppose the only course for me now is to make inquiries down at the port. I shall hear something there, I don't doubt."

"Make inquiries of the devil!" replied Schomberg in a hoarse mutter.

Davidson's purpose in addressing the hotel-keeper had been mainly to make Mrs. Schomberg safe from suspicion; but he would fain have heard something more of Heyst's exploit from another point of view. It was a shrewd try. It was successful in a rather startling way, because the hotel-keeper's point of view was horribly abusive. All of a sudden, in the same hoarse sinister tone, he proceeded to call Heyst many names, of which "pig-dog" was not the worst, with such vehemence that he actually choked himself. Profiting from the pause, Davidson, whose temperament could withstand worse shocks, remonstrated in an undertone:

"It's unreasonable to get so angry as that. Even if he had run off with your cash-box—"

The big hotel-keeper bent down and put his infuriated face close to Davidson's.

"My cash-box! My—he—look here, Captain Davidson! He ran off with a girl. What do I care for the girl? The girl is nothing to me."

He shot out an infamous word which made Davidson start. That's what the girl was; and he reiterated the assertion that she was nothing to him. What he was con-

cerned for was the good name of his house. Wherever he had been established, he had always had "artist parties" staying in his house. One recommended him to the others; but what would happen now, when it got about that leaders ran the risk in his house—his house—of losing members of their troupe? And just now, when he had spent seven hundred and thirty-four guilders in building a concert-hall in his compound. Was that a thing to do in a respectable hotel? The cheek, the indecency, the impudence, the atrocity! Vagabond, impostor, swindler, ruffian, *schwein-hund!*

He had seized Davidson by a button of his coat, detaining him in the doorway, and exactly in the line of Mrs. Schomberg's stony gaze. Davidson stole a glance in that direction, and thought of making some sort of reassuring sign to her, but she looked so bereft of senses, and almost of life, perched up there, that it seemed not worth while. He disengaged his button with firm placidity. Thereupon, with a last stifled curse, Schomberg vanished somewhere within, to try and compose his spirits in solitude. Davidson stepped out on the veranda. The party of customers there had become aware of the explosive interlude in the doorway. Davidson knew one of these men, and nodded to him in passing; but his acquaintance called out:

"Isn't he in a filthy temper? He's been like that ever since."

The speaker laughed aloud, while all the others sat smiling. Davidson stopped.

"Yes, rather." His feelings were, he told us, those of bewildered resignation; but of course that was no more visible to the others than the emotions of a turtle when it withdraws into its shell.

"It seems unreasonable," he murmured thoughtfully.

"Oh, but they had a scrap!" the other said.

"What do you mean? Was there a fight!—a fight with Heyst?" asked Davidson, much perturbed, if somewhat incredulous.

"Heyst? No, these two—the bandmaster, the fellow who's taking these women about and our Schomberg.

Signor Zangiacomo ran amuck in the morning, and went for our worthy friend. I tell you, they were rolling on the floor together on this very veranda, after chasing each other all over the house, doors slamming, women screaming, seventeen of them, in the dining-room; Chinamen up the trees—Hey, John! You climb tree to see the fight, eh?"

The boy, almond-eyed and impassive, emitted a scornful grunt, finished wiping the table, and withdrew.

"That's what it was—a real go-as-you-please scrap. And Zangiacomo began it. Oh, here's Schomberg. Say, Schomberg, didn't he fly at you, when the girl was missed, because it was you who insisted that the artists should go about the audience during the interval?"

Schomberg had reappeared in the doorway. He advanced. His bearing was stately, but his nostrils were extraordinarily expanded, and he controlled his voice with apparent effort.

"Certainly. That was only business. I quoted him special terms and all for your sake, gentlemen. I was thinking of my regular customers. There's nothing to do in the evenings in this town. I think, gentlemen, you were all pleased at the opportunity of hearing a little good music; and where's the harm of offering a grenadine, or what not, to a lady artist? But that fellow—that Swede—he got round the girl. He got round all the people out here. I've been watching him for years. You remember how he got round Morrison."

He changed front abruptly, as if on parade, and marched off. The customers at the table exchanged glances silently. Davidson's attitude was that of a spectator. Schomberg's moody pacing of the billiard-room could be heard on the veranda.

"And the funniest part is," resumed a man who had been speaking before—an English clerk in a Dutch house—"the funniest part is that before nine o'clock that same morning those two were driving together in a gharry down to the port, to look for Heyst and the girl. I saw them rushing around making inquiries. I don't know what they would have done to the girl, but they seemed quite ready to

fall upon your Heyst, Davidson, and kill him on the quay."

He had never, he said, seen anything so queer. Those two investigators working feverishly to the same end were glaring at each other with surprising ferocity. In hatred and mistrust they entered a steam-launch, and went flying from ship to ship all over the harbour, causing no end of sensation. The captains of vessels, coming on shore later in the day, brought tales of a strange invasion, and wanted to know who were the two offensive lunatics in a steam-launch, apparently after a man and a girl, and telling a story of which one could make neither head nor tail. Their reception by the roadstead was generally unsympathetic, even to the point of the mate of an American ship bundling them out over the rail with unseemly precipitation.

Meantime Heyst and the girl were a good few miles away, having gone in the night on board one of the Tesman schooners bound to the eastward. This was known afterward from the Javanese boatmen whom Heyst hired for the purpose at three o'clock in the morning. The Tesman schooner had sailed at daylight with the usual land breeze, and was probably still in sight in the offing at the time. However, the two pursuers, after their experience with the American mate, made for the shore. On landing, they had another violent row in the German language. But there was no second fight; and finally, with looks of fierce animosity, they got together into a gharry—obviously with the frugal view of sharing expenses—and drove away, leaving an astonished little crowd of Europeans and natives on the quay.

After hearing this wondrous tale, Davidson went away from the hotel veranda, which was filling with Schomberg's regular customers. Heyst's escapade was the general topic of conversation. Never before had that unaccountable individual been the cause of so much gossip, he judged. No! Not even in the beginnings of the Tropical Belt Coal Company when becoming for a moment a public character he was the object of silly criticism and unintelligent envy for every vagabond and adventurer in the islands.

Davidson concluded that people liked to discuss that sort of scandal better than any other.

I asked him if he believed that this was such a great scandal after all.

"Heavens, no!" said that excellent man who, himself, was incapable of any impropriety of conduct. "But it isn't a thing I would have done myself; I mean even if I had not been married."

There was no implied condemnation in the statement; rather, something like regret. Davidson shared my suspicion that this was in its essence the rescue of a distressed human being. Not that we were two romantics, tinging the world to the hue of our temperament, but that both of us had been acute enough to discover a long time ago that Heyst was.

"I shouldn't have had the pluck," he continued. "I see a thing all round, as it were; but Heyst doesn't, or else he would have been scared. You don't take a woman into a desert jungle without being made sorry for it sooner or later, in one way or another; and Heyst being a gentleman, only makes it worse."

VI

WE said no more about Heyst on that occasion, and it so happened that I did not meet Davidson again for some three months. When we did come together, almost the first thing he said to me was:

"I've seen him."

Before I could exclaim, he assured me that he had taken no liberty, that he had not intruded. He was called in. Otherwise he would not have dreamed of breaking in upon Heyst's privacy.

"I am certain you wouldn't," I assured him, concealing my amusement at his wonderful delicacy. He was the most delicate man that ever took a small steamer to and fro amongst the Islands. But his humanity, which was not less strong and praiseworthy, had induced him to

take his steamer past Samburan wharf (at an average distance of a mile) every twenty-three days—exactly. Davidson was delicate, humane and regular.

"Heyst called you in?" I asked, interested.

Yes, Heyst had called him in as he was going by on his usual date. Davidson was examining the shore through his glasses with his unwearied and punctual humanity as he steamed past Samburan.

"I saw a man in white. It could only have been Heyst. He had fastened some sort of enormous flag to a bamboo pole, and was waving it at the end of the old wharf."

Davidson didn't like to take his steamer alongside—for fear of being indiscreet, I suppose; but he steered close inshore, stopped his engines, and lowered a boat. He went himself in that boat, which was manned, of course, by his Malay seamen.

Heyst, when he saw the boat pulling toward him, dropped his signalling-pole; and when Davidson arrived, he was kneeling down engaged busily in unfastening the flag from it.

"Was there anything wrong?" I inquired, Davidson having paused in his narrative and my curiosity being naturally aroused. You must remember that Heyst as the Archipelago knew him was not—what shall I say—was not a signalling sort of man.

"The very words that came out of my mouth," said Davidson, "before I laid the boat against the piles. I could not help it."

Heyst got up from his knees and began carefully folding up the flag thing, which struck Davidson as having the dimensions of a blanket.

"No, nothing wrong," he cried. His white teeth flashed agreeably below the coppery horizontal bar of his long moustaches.

I don't know whether it was his delicacy or his obesity which prevented Davidson from clambering upon the wharf. He stood up in the boat, and, above him, Heyst stooped low with urbane smiles, thanking him and apologising for the liberty, exactly in his usual manner. Davidson

had expected some change in the man, but there was none. Nothing in him betrayed the momentous fact that within that jungle there was a girl, a performer in a ladies' orchestra, whom he had carried straight off the concert platform into the wilderness. He was not ashamed or defiant or abashed about it. He might have been a shade confidential when addressing Davidson. And his words were enigmatical.

"I took this course of signalling to you," he said to Davidson, "because to preserve appearances might be of the utmost importance. Not to me, of course. I don't care what people may say, and of course no one can hurt me. I suppose I have done a certain amount of harm, since I allowed myself to be tempted into action. It seemed innocent enough, but all action is bound to be harmful. It is devilish. That is why this world is evil upon the whole. But I have done with it! I shall never lift a little finger again. At one time I thought that intelligent observation of facts was the best way of cheating the time which is allotted to us whether we want it or not; but now I have done with observation, too."

Imagine poor, simple Davidson being addressed in such terms alongside an abandoned, decaying wharf jutting out of tropical bush. He had never heard anybody speak like this before; certainly not Heyst, whose conversation was concise, polite, with a faint ring of playfulness in the cultivated tones of his voice.

"He's gone mad," Davidson thought to himself.

But, looking at the physiognomy above him on the wharf, he was obliged to dismiss the notion of common, crude lunacy. It was truly most unusual talk. Then he remembered—in his surprise he had lost sight of it—that Heyst now had a girl there. This bizarre discourse was probably the effect of the girl. Davidson shook off the absurd feeling, and asked, wishing to make clear his friendliness, and not knowing what else to say:

"You haven't run short of stores or anything like that?"

Heyst smiled and shook his head.

"No, no. Nothing of the kind. We are fairly well

off here. Thanks, all the same. If I have taken the liberty to detain you, it is not from any uneasiness for myself and my—companion. The person I was thinking of when I made up my mind to invoke your assistance is Mrs. Schomberg."

"I have talked with her," interjected Davidson.

"Oh! You? Yes, I hoped she would find means to—"

"But she didn't tell me much," interrupted Davidson, who was not averse from hearing something—he hardly knew what.

"H'm—yes. But that note of mine? Yes? She found an opportunity to give it to you? That's good, very good. She's more resourceful than one would give her credit for."

"Women often are," remarked Davidson. The strangeness from which he had suffered, merely because his interlocutor had carried off a girl, wore off as the minutes went by. "There's a lot of unexpectedness about women," he generalised with a didactic aim which seemed to miss its mark; for the next thing Heyst said was:

"This is Mrs. Schomberg's shawl." He touched the stuff hanging over his arm. "An Indian thing, I believe," he added, glancing at his arm sideways.

"It isn't of particular value," said Davidson truthfully.

"Very likely. The point is that it belongs to Schomberg's wife. That Schomberg seems to be an unconscionable ruffian—don't you think so?"

Davidson smiled faintly.

"We out here have got used to him," he said, as if excusing a universal and guilty toleration of a manifest nuisance. "I'd hardly call him that. I only know him as a hotel-keeper."

"I never knew him even as that—not till this time, when you were so obliging as to take me to Sourabaya, I went to stay there from economy. The Netherlands House is very expensive, and they expect you to bring your own servant with you. It's a nuisance."

"Of course, of course," protested Davidson hastily.

After a short silence Heyst returned to the matter of the shawl. He wanted to send it back to Mrs. Schomberg. He said that it might be very awkward for her if she were unable, if asked, to produce it. This had given him, Heyst, much uneasiness. She was terrified of Schomberg. Apparently she had reason to be.

Davidson had remarked that, too. Which did not prevent her, he pointed out, from making a fool of him, in a way, for the sake of a stranger.

"Oh! You know!" said Heyst. "Yes, she helped me—us."

"She told me so. I had quite a talk with her," Davidson informed him. "Fancy any one having a talk with Mrs. Schomberg! If I were to tell the fellows they wouldn't believe me. How did you get round her, Heyst? How did you think of it? Why, she looks too stupid to understand human speech and too scared to shoo a chicken away. Oh, the women, the women! You don't know what there may be in the quietest of them."

"She was engaged in the task of defending her position in life," said Heyst. "It's a very respectable task."

"Is that it? I had some idea it was that," confessed Davidson.

He then imparted to Heyst the story of the violent proceedings following on the discovery of his flight. Heyst's polite attention to the tale took on a sombre cast; but he manifested no surprise, and offered no comment. When Davidson had finished he handed down the shawl into the boat, and Davidson promised to do his best to return it to Mrs. Schomberg in some secret fashion. Heyst expressed his thanks in a few simple words, set off by his manner of finished courtesy. Davidson prepared to depart. They were not looking at each other. Suddenly Heyst spoke:

"You understand that this was a case of odious persecution, don't you? I became aware of it and—"

It was a view which the sympathetic Davidson was capable of appreciating.

"I am not surprised to hear it," he said placidly. "Odious enough, I dare say. And you, of course—not being a married man—were free to step in. Ah, well!"

He sat down in the stern-sheets, and already had the steering lines in his hands when Heyst observed abruptly:

"The world is a bad dog. It will bite you if you give it a chance; but I think that here we can safely defy the fates."

When relating all this to me, Davidson's only comment was:

"Funny notion of defying the fates—to take a woman in tow!"

VII

SOME considerable time afterward—we did not meet very often—I asked Davidson how he had managed about the shawl and heard that he had tackled his mission in a direct way, and had found it easy enough. At the very first call he made in Sourabaya he rolled the shawl as tightly as he could into the smallest possible brown paper parcel, which he carried ashore with him. His business in the town being transacted, he got into a gharry with the parcel and drove to the hotel. With his previous experience, he timed his arrival accurately for the hour of Schomberg's siesta. Finding the place empty as on the former occasion, he marched into the billiard-room, took a seat at the back, near the sort of dais which Mrs. Schomberg would in due course come to occupy, and broke the slumbering silence of the house by thumping a bell vigorously. Of course a Chinaman appeared promptly. Davidson ordered a drink and sat tight.

"I would have ordered twenty drinks one after another, if necessary," he said—Davidson's a very abstemious man—"rather than take that parcel out of the house again. Couldn't leave it in a corner without letting the woman know it was there. It might have turned out worse for her than not bringing the thing back at all."

And so he waited, ringing the bell again and again, and swallowing two or three iced drinks which he did not want. Presently, as he hoped it would happen, Mrs. Schomberg came in, silk dress, long neck, ringlets, scared eyes, and silly grin—all complete. Probably that lazy beast had sent her

out to see who was the thirsty customer waking up the echoes of the house at this quiet hour. Bow, nod—and she clambered up to her post behind the raised counter, looking so helpless, so inane, as she sat there, that if it hadn't been for the parcel, Davidson declared, he would have thought he had merely dreamed of all that had passed between them. He ordered another drink, to get the Chinaman out of the room, and then seized the parcel, which was reposing on a chair near him, and with no more than a mutter—"This is something of yours"—he rammed it swiftly into a recess in the counter, at her feet. There! The rest was her affair. And just in time, too. Schomberg turned up, yawning affectedly, almost before Davidson had regained his seat. He cast about suspicious and irate glances. An invincible placidity of expression helped Davidson wonderfully at the moment, and the other, of course, could have no grounds for the slightest suspicion of any sort of understanding between his wife and this customer.

As to Mrs. Schomberg, she sat there like a joss. Davidson was lost in admiration. He believed, now, that the woman had been putting it on for years. She never even winked. It was immense! The insight he had obtained almost frightened him; he couldn't get over his wonder at knowing more of the real Mrs. Schomberg than anybody in the Islands, including Schomberg himself. She was a miracle of dissimulation. No wonder Heyst got the girl away from under two men's noses, if he had her to help with the job!

The greatest wonder, after all, was Heyst getting mixed up with petticoats. The fellow's life had been open to us for years and nothing could have been more detached from feminine associations. Except that he stood drinks to people on suitable occasions, like any other man, this observer of facts seemed to have no connection with earthly affairs and passions. The very courtesy of his manner, the flavour of playfulness in the voice set him apart. He was like a feather floating lightly in the work-a-day atmosphere which was the breath of our nostrils. For this reason whenever this looker-on took contact with things he

attracted attention. First, it was the Morrison partnership of mystery; then came the great sensation of the Tropical Belt Coal where indeed varied interests were involved: a real business matter. And then came this elopement, this incongruous phenomenon of self-assertion, the greatest wonder of all, astonishing and amusing.

Davidson admitted to me that the hubbub was subsiding; and the affair would have been already forgotten, perhaps, if that ass Schomberg had not kept on gnashing his teeth publicly about it. It was really provoking that Davidson should not be able to give one some idea of the girl. Was she pretty? He didn't know. He had stayed the whole afternoon in Schomberg's hotel, mainly for the purpose of finding out something about her. But the story was growing stale. The parties at the tables on the veranda had other, fresher, events to talk about and Davidson shrank from making direct inquiries. He sat placidly there, content to be disregarded, and hoping for some chance word to turn up. I shouldn't wonder if the good fellow hadn't been dozing. It's difficult to give you an adequate idea of Davidson's placidity.

Presently Schomberg, wandering about, joined a party that had taken the table next to Davidson's.

"A man like that Swede, gentlemen, is a public danger," he began. "I remember him for years. I won't say anything of his spying—well, he used to say himself he was looking for out-of-the-way facts, and what is that if not spying? He was spying into everybody's business. He got hold of Captain Morrison, squeezed him dry, like you would an orange, and scared him off to Europe to die there. Everybody knows that Captain Morrison had a weak chest. Robbed first and murdered afterward! I don't mince words—not I. Next he gets up that swindle of the Belt Coal. You all know about it. And now, after lining his pockets with other people's money, he kidnaps a white girl belonging to an orchestra which is performing in my public room for the benefit of my patrons, and goes off to live like a prince on that island, where nobody can get at him A dam' silly girl . . . It's disgusting—tfui!"

He spat. He choked with rage—for he saw visions, no

doubt. He jumped up from his chair, and went away to flee from them—perhaps. He went into the room where Mrs. Schomberg sat. Her aspect could not have been very soothing to the sort of torment from which he was suffering.

Davidson did not feel called upon to defend Heyst. His proceeding was to enter into conversation with one and another, casually, and showing no particular knowledge of the affair, in order to discover something about the girl. Was she anything out of the way? Was she pretty? She couldn't have been markedly so. She had not attracted special notice. She was young—on that everybody agreed. The English clerk of Tesmans remembered that she had a sallow face. He was respectable and highly proper. He was not the sort to associate with such people. Most of these women were fairly battered specimens. Schomberg had them housed in what he called the Pavilion in the grounds, where they were hard at it mending and washing their white dresses, and could be seen hanging them out to dry between the trees, like a lot of washerwomen. They looked very much like middle-aged washerwomen on the platform, too. But the girl had been living in the main building along with the boss, the director, the fellow with the black beard, and a hard-bitten, oldish woman who took the piano and was understood to be the fellow's wife.

This was not a very satisfactory result. Davidson stayed on, and even joined the table d'hôte dinner, without gleaning any more information. He was resigned.

"I suppose," he wheezed placidly, "I am bound to see her some day."

He meant to take the Samburan channel every trip, as before, of course.

"Yes," I said. "No doubt you will. Some day Heyst will be signalling to you again; and I wonder what it will be for."

Davidson made no reply. He had his own ideas about that, and his silence concealed a good deal of thought. We spoke no more of Heyst's girl. Before we separated, he gave me a piece of unrelated observation.

"It's funny," he said, "but I fancy there's some gambling going on in the evening at Schomberg's place, on the quiet. I've noticed men strolling away in twos and threes towards that hall where the orchestra used to play. The windows must be specially well shuttered, because I could not spy the smallest gleam of light from that direction; but I can't believe that those beggars would go in there only to sit and think of their sins in the dark."

"That's strange. It's incredible that Schomberg should risk that sort of thing," I said.

PART II

I

AS we know, Heyst had gone to stay in Schomberg's hotel in complete ignorance that his person was odious to that worthy. When he arrived, Zangiacomo's Ladies' Orchestra had been established there for some time.

The business which had called him out from his seclusion in his lost corner of the Eastern seas was with the Tesmans, and it had something to do with money. He transacted it quickly, and then found himself with nothing to do while he awaited Davidson, who was to take him back to his solitude; for back to his solitude Heyst meant to go. He whom we used to refer to as the Enchanted Heyst was suffering from thorough disenchantment. Not with the islands, however. The Archipelago has a lasting fascination. It is not easy to shake off the spell of island life. Heyst was disenchanted with life as a whole. His scornful temperament, beguiled into action, suffered from failure in a subtle way unknown to men accustomed to grapple with the realities of common human enterprise. It was like the gnawing pain of useless apostasy, a sort of shame before his own betrayed nature; and, in addition, he also suffered from plain, downright remorse. He deemed himself guilty of Morrison's death. A rather absurd feeling, since no one could possibly have foreseen the horrors of the cold, wet summer lying in wait for poor Morrison at home.

It was not in Heyst's character to turn morose; but his mental state was not compatible with a sociable mood. He spent his evenings sitting apart on the veranda of

Schomberg's hotel. The lamentations of string intruments issued from the building in the hotel compound, the approaches to which were decorated with Japanese paper lanterns strung up between the trunks of several big trees. Scraps of tunes more or less plaintive reached his ears. They pursued him even into his bedroom, which opened into an upstairs veranda. The fragmentary and rasping character of these sounds made their intrusion inexpressibly tedious in the long run. Like most dreamers, to whom it is given sometimes to hear the music of the spheres, Heyst, the wanderer of the Archipelago, had a taste for silence which he had been able to gratify for years. The islands are very quiet. One sees them lying about, clothed in their dark garments of leaves, in a great hush of silver and azure, where the sea without murmurs meets the sky in a ring of magic stillness. A sort of smiling somnolence broods over them; the very voices of their people are soft and subdued, as if afraid to break some protecting spell.

Perhaps this was the very spell which had enchanted Heyst in the early days. For him, however, that was broken. He was no longer enchanted, though he was still a captive of the islands. He had no intention to leave them ever. Where could he have gone to, after all these years? Not a single soul belonging to him lived anywhere on earth. Of this fact—not such a remote one, after all—he had only lately become aware; for it is failure that makes a man enter into himself and reckon up his resources. And though he had made up his mind to retire from the world in hermit fashion, yet he was irrationally moved by this sense of loneliness which had come to him in the hour of renunciation. It hurt him. Nothing is more painful than the shock of sharp contradictions that lacerate our intelligence and our feelings.

Meantime Schomberg watched Heyst out of the corner of his eye. Towards the unconscious object of his enmity he preserved a distant Lieutenant-of-the-Reserve demeanour. Nudging certain of his customers with his elbow, he begged them to observe what airs "that Swede" was giving himself.

"I really don't know why he has come to stay in my house. This place isn't good enough for him. I wish to goodness he had gone somewhere else to show off his superiority. Here I have got up this series of concerts for you gentlemen, just to make things a little brighter generally; and do you think he'll condescend to step in and listen to a piece or two of an evening? Not he. I know him of old. There he sits at the dark end of the piazza, all the evening long—planning some new swindle, no doubt. For twopence I would ask him to go and look for quarters somewhere else; only one doesn't like to treat a white man like that out in the tropics. I don't know how long he means to stay, but I'm willing to bet a trifle that he'll never work himself up to the point of spending the fifty cents of entrance money for the sake of a little good music."

Nobody cared to bet, or the hotel-keeper would have lost. One evening Heyst was driven to desperation by the rasped, squeaked, scraped snatches of tunes pursuing him even to his hard couch, with a mattress as thin as a pancake and a diaphanous mosquito net. He descended among the trees, where the soft glow of Japanese lanterns picked out parts of their great rugged trunks, here and there, in the great mass of darkness under the lofty foliage. More lanterns, of the shape of cylindrical concertinas, hanging in a row from a slack string, decorated the doorway of what Schomberg called grandiloquently "my concert-hall." In his desperate mood Heyst ascended three steps, lifted a calico curtain, and went in.

The uproar in that small barn-like structure, built of imported pine boards, and raised clear of the ground, was simply stunning. An instrumental uproar, screaming, grunting, whining, sobbing, scraping, squeaking some kind of lively air; while a grand piano, operated upon by a bony, red-faced woman with bad-tempered nostrils, rained hard notes like hail through the tempest of fiddles. The small platform was filled with white muslin dresses and crimson sashes slanting from shoulders provided with bare arms, which sawed away without respite. Zangiacomo conducted. He wore a white mess-jacket, a black dress waist-

coat, and white trousers. His longish, tousled hair and his great beard were purple-black. He was horrible. The heat was terrific. There were perhaps thirty people having drinks at several little tables. Heyst, quite overcome by the volume of noise, dropped into a chair. In the quick time of that music, in the varied, piercing clamour of the strings, in the movements of the bare arms, in the low dresses, the coarse faces, the stony eyes of the executants, there was a suggestion of brutality—something cruel, sensual, and repulsive.

"This is awful!" Heyst murmured to himself.

But there is an unholy fascination in systematic noise. He did not flee from it incontinently, as one might have expected him to do. He remained, astonished at himself for remaining, since nothing could have been more repulsive to his tastes, more painful to his senses, and, so to speak, more contrary to his genius, than this rude exhibition of vigour. The Zangiacomo band was not making music; it was simply murdering silence with a vulgar, ferocious energy. One felt as if witnessing a deed of violence; and that impression was so strong that it seemed marvellous to see the people sitting so quietly on their chairs, drinking so calmly out of their glasses, and giving no signs of distress, anger or fear. Heyst averted his gaze from the unnatural spectacle of their indifference.

When the piece of music came to an end, the relief was so great that he felt slightly dizzy, as if a chasm of silence had yawned at his feet. When he raised his eyes, the audience, most perversely, was exhibiting signs of animation and interest in their faces, and the women in white muslin dresses were coming down in pairs from the platform into the body of Schomberg's "concert-hall." They dispersed themselves all over the place. The male creature with the hooked nose and purple-black beard disappeared somewhere. This was the interval during which, as the astute Schomberg had stipulated, the members of the orchestra were encouraged to favour the members of the audience with their company—that is, such members as seemed inclined to fraternise with the arts in a familiar and generous

manner; the symbol of familiarity and generosity consisting in offers of refreshment.

The procedure struck Heyst as highly incorrect. However, the impropriety of Schomberg's ingenious scheme was defeated by the circumstance that most of the women were no longer young, and that none of them had ever been beautiful. Their more or less worn cheeks were slightly rouged; but apart from that fact, which might have been simply a matter of routine, they did not seem to take the success of the scheme unduly to heart. The impulse to fraternise with the arts being obviously weak in the audience, some of the musicians sat down listlessly at unoccupied tables, while others went on perambulating the central passage arm in arm, glad enough, no doubt, to stretch their legs while resting their arms. Their crimson sashes gave a factitious touch of gaiety to the smoky atmosphere of the concert-hall; and Heyst felt a sudden pity for these beings, exploited, hopeless, devoid of charm and grace, whose fate of cheerless dependence invested their coarse and joyless features with a touch of pathos.

Heyst was temperamentally sympathetic. To have them passing and repassing close to his little table was painful to him. He was preparing to rise and go out when he noticed that two white muslin dresses and crimson sashes had not yet left the platform. One of these dresses concealed the raw-boned frame of the woman with the bad-tempered curve to her nostrils. She was no less a personage than Mrs. Zangiacomo. She had left the piano, and, with her back to the hall, was preparing the parts for the second half of the concert, with a brusque, impatient action of her ugly elbows. This task done, she turned, and, perceiving the other white muslin dress motionless on a chair in the second row, she strode toward it between the music-stands with an aggressive and masterful gait. On the lap of that dress there lay, unclasped and idle, a pair of small hands, not very white, attached to well-formed arms. The next detail Heyst was led to observe was the arrangement of the hair—two thick brown tresses rolled round an attractively shaped head.

"A girl, by Jove!" he exclaimed mentally.

It was evident that she was a girl. It was evident in the outline of the shoulders, in the slender white bust springing up, barred slantwise by the crimson sash, from the bell-shaped spread of muslin skirt hiding the chair on which she sat averted a little from the body of the hall. Her feet, in low white shoes, were crossed prettily.

She had captured Heyst's awakened faculty of observation; he had the sensation of a new experience. That was because his faculty of observation had never before been captured by any feminine creature in that marked and exclusive fashion. He looked at her anxiously, as no man ever looks at another man; and he positively forgot where he was. He had lost touch with his surroundings. The big woman, advancing, concealed the girl from his sight for a moment. She bent over the seated youthful figure, in passing it very close, as if to drop a word into its ear. Her lips did certainly move. But what sort of word could it have been to make the girl jump up so swiftly? Heyst, at his table, was surprised into a sympathetic start. He glanced quickly around. Nobody was looking toward the platform; and when his eyes swept back there again, the girl, with the big woman treading at her heels, was coming down the three steps from the platform to the floor of the hall. There she paused, stumbled one pace forward, and stood still again, while the other—the escort, the dragoon, the coarse big woman of the piano—passed her roughly, and, marching truculently down the centre aisle between the chairs and tables, went out to rejoin the hook-nosed Zangiacomo somewhere outside. During her extraordinary transit, as if everything in the hall were dirt under her feet, her scornful eyes met the upward glance of Heyst, who looked away at once toward the girl. She had not moved. Her arms hung down; her eyelids were lowered.

Heyst laid down his half-smoked cigar and compressed his lips. Then he got up. It was the same sort of impulse which years ago had made him cross the sandy street of the abominable town of Delli in the island of Timor and accost Morrison, practically a stranger to him

then, a man in trouble, expressively harassed, dejected, lonely.

It was the same impulse. But he did not recognise it. He was not thinking of Morrison then. It may be said that, for the first time since the final abandonment of the Samburan coal mine, he had completely forgotten the late Morrison. It is true that to a certain extent he had forgotten also where he was. Thus, unchecked by any sort of self-consciousness, Heyst walked up the central passage.

Several of the women, by this time, had found anchorage here and there among the occupied tables. They talked to the men, leaning on their elbows, and suggesting funnily—if it hadn't been for the crimson sashes—in their white dresses an assembly of middle-aged brides with free and easy manners and hoarse voices. The murmuring noise of conversations carried on with some spirit filled Schomberg's concert-room. Nobody remarked Heyst's movements; for indeed he was not the only man on his legs there. He had been confronting the girl for some time before she became aware of his presence. She was looking down, very still, without colour, without glances, without voice, without movement. It was only when Heyst addressed her in his courteous tone that she raised her eyes.

"Excuse me," he said in English, "but that horrible female has done something to you. She has pinched you, hasn't she? I am sure she pinched you just now, when she stood by your chair."

The girl received this overture with the wide, motionless stare of profound astonishment. Heyst, vexed with himself, suspected that she did not understand what he said. One could not tell what nationality these women were, except that they were of all sorts. But she was astonished almost more by the near presence of the man himself, by this largely bald head, by the white brow, the sunburnt cheeks, the long, horizontal moustaches of crinkly bronze hair, by the kindly expression of the man's blue eyes looking into her own. He saw the stony amazement in hers give way to a momentary alarm, which was succeeded by an expression of resignation.

"I am sure she pinched your arm most cruelly," he murmured, rather disconcerted now at what he had done.

It was a great comfort to hear her say:

"It wouldn't have been the first time. And suppose she did—what are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know," he said with a faint, remote playfulness in his tone which had not been heard in it lately, and which seemed to catch her ear pleasantly. "I am grieved to say that I don't know. But can I do anything? What would you wish me to do? Pray command me."

Again the greatest astonishment became visible in her face; for she now perceived how different he was from the other men in the room. He was as different from them as she was different from the other members of the ladies' orchestra.

"Command you?" she breathed, after a time, in a bewildered tone. "Who are you?" she asked, a little louder.

"I am staying in this hotel for a few days. I just dropped in casually here. This outrage—"

"Don't you try to interfere," she said so earnestly that Heyst asked, in his faintly playful tone:

"Is it your wish that I should leave you?"

"I haven't said that," the girl answered. "She pinched me because I didn't get down here quick enough."

"I can't tell you how indignant I am," said Heyst. "But since you are down here now," he went on, with the ease of a man of the world speaking to a young lady in a drawing-room, "hadn't we better sit down?"

She obeyed his inviting gesture, and they sat down on the nearest chairs. They looked at each other across a little round table with a surprised, open gaze, self-consciousness growing on them so slowly that it was a long time before they averted their eyes; and very soon they met again, temporarily, only to rebound, as it were. At last they steadied in contact, but by that time, say some fifteen minutes from the moment when they sat down, the "interval" came to an end.

So much for their eyes. As to the conversation, it had

been perfectly insignificant, because naturally they had nothing to say to each other. Heyst had been interested by the girl's physiognomy. Its expression was neither simple nor yet very clear. It was not distinguished—that could not be expected—but the features had more fineness than those of any other feminine countenance he had ever had the opportunity to observe so closely. There was in it something indefinably audacious and infinitely miserable—because the temperament and the existence of that girl were reflected in it. But her voice! It seduced Heyst by its amazing quality. It was a voice fit to utter the most exquisite things, a voice which would have made silly chatter supportable and the roughest talk fascinating. Heyst drank in its charm as one listens to the tone of some instrument without heeding the tune.

"Do you sing as well as play?" he asked her abruptly.

"Never sang a note in my life," she said, obviously surprised by the irrelevant question; for they had not been discoursing of sweet sounds. She was clearly unaware of her voice. "I don't remember that I ever had much reason to sing since I was little," she added.

That inelegant phrase, by the mere vibrating, warm nobility of sound, found its way into Heyst's heart. His mind, cool, alert, watched it sink there with a sort of vague concern at the absurdity of the occupation, till it rested at the bottom, deep down, where our unexpressed longings lie.

"You are English, of course?" he said.

"What do you think?" she answered in the most charming accents. Then, as if thinking that it was her turn to place a question: "Why do you always smile when you speak?"

It was enough to make any one look grave; but her good faith was so evident that Heyst recovered himself at once.

"It's my unfortunate manner," he said with his delicate, polished playfulness. "Is it very objectionable to you?"

She was very serious.

"No. I only noticed it. I haven't come across so many pleasant people as all that, in my life."

"It's certain that this woman who plays the piano is infinitely more disagreeable than any cannibal I have ever had to do with."

"I believe you!" She shuddered. "How did you come to have anything to do with cannibals?"

"It would be too long a tale," said Heyst, with a faint smile. Heyst's smiles were rather melancholy, and accorded badly with his great moustaches, under which his mere playfulness lurked as comfortably as a shy bird in its native thicket. "Much too long. How did you get amongst this lot here?"

"Bad luck," she answered briefly.

"No doubt, no doubt," Heyst assented with slight nods. Then, still indignant at the pinch which he had divined rather than actually seen inflicted: "I say, couldn't you defend yourself somehow?"

She had risen already. The ladies of the orchestra were slowly regaining their places. Some were already seated, idle, stony-eyed, before the music-stands. Heyst was standing up, too.

"They are too many for me," she said.

These few words came out of the common experience of mankind; yet, by virtue of her voice, they thrilled Heyst like a revelation. His feelings were in a state of confusion, but his mind was clear.

"That's bad. But it isn't actual ill-usage that this girl is complaining of," he thought lucidly after she left him.

II

THAT was how it began. How it was that it ended as we know it did end, is not so easy to state precisely. It is very clear that Heyst was not indifferent, I won't say to the girl, but to the girl's fate. He was the same man who had plunged after the submerged Morrison whom he hardly knew otherwise than by sight

and through the usual gossip of the islands. But this was another sort of plunge altogether, and likely to lead to a very different kind of partnership.

Did he reflect at all? Probably. He was sufficiently reflective. But if he did, it was with insufficient knowledge. For there is no evidence that he paused at any time between the date of that evening and the morning of the flight. Truth to say, Heyst was not one of those men who pause much. Those dreamy spectators of the world's agitation are terrible once the desire to act gets hold of them. They lower their heads and charge a wall with an amazing serenity which nothing but an indisciplined imagination can give.

He was not a fool. I suppose he knew—or at least he felt—where this was leading him. But his complete inexperience gave him the necessary audacity. The girl's voice was charming when she spoke to him of her miserable past, in simple terms, with a sort of unconscious cynicism inherent in the truth of the ugly conditions of poverty. And whether because he was humane or because her voice included all the modulations of pathos, cheerfulness and courage in its compass, it was not disgust that the tale awakened in him, but the sense of an immense sadness.

On a later evening, during the interval between the two parts of the concert, the girl told Heyst about herself. She was almost a child of the streets. Her father was a musician in the orchestras of small theatres. Her mother ran away from him while she was little, and the landladies of various poor lodging-houses had attended casually to her abandoned childhood. It was never positive starvation and absolute rags, but it was the hopeless grip of poverty all the time. It was her father who taught her to play the violin. It seemed that he used to get drunk sometimes, but without pleasure, and only because he was unable to forget his fugitive wife. After he had a paralytic stroke, falling over with a crash in the well of a music-hall orchestra during the performance, she had joined the Zangiacomo company. He was now in a home for incurables.

"And I am here," she finished, "with no one to care

if I make a hole in the water the next chance I get or not."

Heyst told her that he thought she could do a little better than that, if it was only a question of getting out of the world. She looked at him with special attention, and with a puzzled expression which gave to her face an air of innocence.

This was during one of the "intervals" between the two parts of the concert. She had come down that time without being incited thereto by a pinch from the awful Zangiacomo woman. It is difficult to suppose that she was seduced by the uncovered intellectual forehead and the long reddish moustaches of her new friend. New is not the right word. She had never had a friend before; and the sensation of this friendliness going out to her was exciting by its novelty alone. Besides, any man who did not resemble Schomberg appeared for that very reason attractive. She was afraid of the hotel-keeper, who, in the daytime, taking advantage of the fact that she lived in the hotel itself, and not in the Pavilion with the other "artists," prowled round her, mute, hungry, portentous behind his great beard, or else assailed her in quiet corners and empty passages with deep, mysterious murmurs from behind, which, notwithstanding their clear import, sounded horribly insane somehow.

The contrast of Heyst's quiet, polished manner gave her special delight and filled her with admiration. She had never seen anything like that before. If she had, perhaps, known kindness in her life, she had never met the forms of simple courtesy. She was interested by it as by a very novel experience, not very intelligible, but distinctly pleasurable.

"I tell you they are too many for me," she repeated, sometimes recklessly, but more often shaking her head with ominous dejection.

She had, of course, no money at all. The quantities of "black men" all about frightened her. She really had no definite idea where she was on the surface of the globe. The orchestra was generally taken from the steamer to some hotel, and kept shut up there till it was

time to go on board another steamer. She could not remember the names she heard.

"How do you call this place again?" she used to ask Heyst.

"Sourabaya," he would say distinctly, and would watch the discouragement at the outlandish sound coming into her eyes, which were fastened on his face.

He could not defend himself from compassion. He suggested that she might go to the consul, but it was his conscience that dictated this advice, not his conviction. She had never heard of the animal or of its uses. A consul! What was it? Who was he? What could he do? And when she learned that perhaps he could be induced to send her home, her head dropped on her breast.

"What am I to do when I get there?" she murmured with an intonation so just, with an accent so penetrating—the charm of her voice did not fail her even in whispering—that Heyst seemed to see the illusion of human fellowship on earth vanish before the naked truth of her existence, and leave them both face to face in a moral desert as arid as the sands of Sahara, without restful shade, without refreshing water.

She leaned slightly over the little table, the same little table at which they had sat when they first met each other; and with no other memories but of the stones in the streets her childhood had known, in the distress of the incoherent, confused, rudimentary impressions of her travels inspiring her with a vague terror of the world, she said rapidly, as one speaks in desperation:

"*You* do something! You are a gentleman. It wasn't I who spoke to you first, was it? I didn't begin, did I? It was you who came along and spoke to me when I was standing over there. What did you want to speak to me for? I don't care what it is, but you must do something."

Her attitude was fierce and entreating at the same time—clamorous, in fact, though her voice had hardly risen above a breath. It was clamorous enough to be noticed. Heyst, on purpose, laughed aloud. She nearly choked with indignation at this brutal heartlessness.

"What did you mean, then, by saying 'command me'?" she almost hissed.

Something hard in his mirthless stare, and a quiet final "All right," steadied her.

"I am not rich enough to buy you out," he went on, speaking with an extraordinary detached grin, "even if it were to be done; but I can always steal you."

She looked at him profoundly, as though these words had a hidden and very complicated meaning.

"Get away now," he said rapidly, "and try to smile as you go."

She obeyed with unexpected readiness; and as she had a set of very good white teeth, the effect of the mechanical, ordered smile was joyous, radiant. It astonished Heyst. No wonder, it flashed through his mind, women can deceive men so completely. The faculty was inherent in them; they seemed to be created with a special aptitude. Here was a smile the origin of which was well known to him; and yet it had conveyed a sensation of warmth, had given him a sort of ardour to live which was very new to his experience.

By this time she was gone from the table, and had joined the other "ladies of the orchestra." They trooped towards the platform, driven in truculently by the haughty mate of Zangiacomo, who looked as though she were restraining herself with difficulty from punching their backs. Zangiacomo followed, with his great, pendulous dyed beard and short mess-jacket, with an aspect of hang-dog concentration imparted by his drooping head and the uneasiness of his eyes, which were set very close together. He climbed the steps last of all, turned about, displaying his purple beard to the hall, and tapped with his bow. Heyst winced in anticipation of the horrible racket. It burst out immediately unabashed and awful. At the end of the platform the woman at the piano, presenting her cruel profile, her head tilted back, banged the keys without looking at the music.

Heyst could not stand the uproar for more than a minute. He went out, his brain racked by the rhythm of some more or less Hungarian dance music. The forests inhabited

by the New Guinea cannibals where he had encountered the most exciting of his earlier futile adventures were silent. And this adventure, not in its execution, perhaps, but in its nature, required even more nerve than anything he had faced before. Walking among the paper lanterns suspended to trees he remembered with regret the gloom and the dead stillness of the forests at the back of Geelvink Bay, perhaps the wildest, the unsafest, the most deadly spot on earth from which the sea can be seen. Oppressed by his thoughts, he sought the obscurity and peace of his bedroom; but they were not complete. The distant sounds of the concert reached his ear, faint indeed but still disturbing. Neither did he feel very safe in there; for that sentiment depends not on extraneous circumstances but on our inward conviction. He did not attempt to go to sleep; he did not even unbutton the top button of his tunic. He sat in a chair and mused. Formerly, in solitude and in silence, he had been used to think clearly and sometimes even profoundly, seeing life outside the flattering optical delusion of everlasting hope, of conventional self-deceptions, of an ever-expected happiness. But now he was troubled; a light veil seemed to hang before his mental vision; the awakening of a tenderness, indistinct and confused as yet, toward an unknown woman.

Gradually silence, a real silence, had established itself round him. The concert was over; the audience had gone; the concert-hall was dark; and even the Pavilion where the ladies' orchestra slept after its noisy labours, showed not a gleam of light. Heyst suddenly felt restless in all his limbs. As this reaction from the long immobility would not be denied, he humoured it by passing quietly along the back veranda and out into the grounds at the side of the house, into the black shadows under the trees, where the extinguished paper lanterns were gently swinging their globes like withered fruit.

He paced there to and fro for a long time, a calm, meditative ghost in his white drill suit, revolving in his head thoughts absolutely novel, disquieting, and seductive; accustoming his mind to the contemplation of his purpose, in order that by being faced steadily it should appear

praiseworthy and wise. For the use of reason is to justify the obscure desires that move our conduct, impulses, passions, prejudices and follies, and also our fears.

He felt that he had engaged himself by a rash promise to an action big with incalculable consequences. And then he asked himself if the girl had understood what he meant. Who could tell? He was assailed by all sorts of doubts. Raising his head, he perceived something white flitting between the trees. It vanished almost at once; but there could be no mistake. He was vexed at being detected roaming like this in the middle of the night. Who could that be? It never occurred to him that perhaps the girl, too, would not be able to sleep. He advanced prudently. Then he saw the white, phantom-like apparition again; and next moment all his doubts as to the state of her mind were laid at rest, because he felt her clinging to him after the manner of supplicants all the world over. Her whispers were so incoherent that he could not understand anything; but this did not prevent him from being profoundly moved. He had no illusions about her; but his sceptical mind was dominated by the fulness of his heart.

"Calm yourself, calm yourself," he murmured in her ear, returning her clasp at first mechanically, and afterward with a growing appreciation of her distressed humanity. The heaving of her breast and the trembling of all her limbs, in the closeness of his embrace, seemed to enter his body, to infect his very heart. While she was growing quieter in his arms, he was becoming more agitated, as if there were only a fixed quantity of violent emotion on this earth. The very night seemed more dumb, more still, and the immobility of the vague, black shapes surrounding him more perfect.

"It will be all right," he tried to reassure her, with a tone of conviction, speaking into her ear, and of necessity clasping her more closely than before.

Either the words or the action had a very good effect. He heard a light sigh of relief. She spoke with a calmed ardour.

"Oh, I knew it would be all right from the first time

you spoke to me! Yes, indeed, I knew directly you came up to me that evening. I knew it would be all right if you only cared to make it so; but of course I could not tell if you meant it. 'Command me,' you said. Funny thing for a man like you to say. Did you really mean it? You weren't making fun of me?"

He protested that he had been a serious person all his life.

"I believe you," she said ardently. He was touched by this declaration. "It's the way you have of speaking as if you were amused with people," she went on. "But I wasn't deceived. I could see you were angry with that beast of a woman. And you are clever. You spotted something at once. You saw it in my face, eh? It isn't a bad face—say? You'll never be sorry. Listen—I'm not twenty yet. It's the truth, and I can't be so bad-looking, or else—I will tell you straight that I have been worried and pestered by fellows like this before. I don't know what comes to them—"

She was speaking hurriedly. She choked, and then exclaimed, with an accent of despair:

"What is it? What's the matter?"

Heyst had removed his arms from her suddenly, and had recoiled a little. "Is it my fault? I didn't even look at them, I tell you straight. Never! Have I looked at you? Tell me. It was you that began it."

In truth, Heyst had shrunk from the idea of competition with fellows unknown, with Schomberg the hotel-keeper. The vaporous white figure before him swayed pitifully in the darkness. He felt ashamed of his fastidiousness.

"I am afraid we have been detected," he murmured. "I think I saw somebody on the path between the house and the bushes behind you."

He had seen no one. It was a compassionate lie, if there ever was one. His compassion was as genuine as his shrinking had been, and in his judgment more honourable.

She didn't turn her head. She was obviously relieved.

"Would it be that brute?" she breathed out, meaning

Schomberg, of course. "He's getting too forward with me now. What can you expect? Only this evening, after supper, he—but I slipped away. You don't mind him, do you? Why, I could face him myself now that I know you care for me. A girl can always put up a fight. You believe me? Only it isn't easy to stand up for yourself when you feel there's nothing and nobody at your back. There's nothing so lonely in the world as a girl who has got to look after herself. When I left poor dad in that home—it was in the country, near a village—I came out of the gates with seven shillings and threepence in my old purse, and my railway ticket. I tramped a mile, and got into a train—"

She broke off, and was silent for a moment.

"Don't you throw me over now," she went on. "If you did, what should I do? I should have to live, to be sure, because I'd be afraid to kill myself; but you would have done a thousand times worse than killing a body. You told me you had been always alone, you had never had a dog, even. Well, then, I won't be in anybody's way if I live with you—not even a dog's. And what else did you mean when you came up and looked at me so close?"

"Close? Did I?" he murmured unstirring before her in the profound darkness. "So close as that?"

She had an outbreak of anger and despair in subdued tones.

"Have you forgotten, then? What did you expect to find? I know what sort of girl I am; but all the same I am not the sort that men turn their backs on—and you ought to know it, unless you aren't made like the others. Oh, forgive me! You aren't like the others; you are like no one in the world I ever spoke to. Don't you care for me? Don't you see—?"

What he saw was that, white and spectral, she was putting out her arms to him out of the black shadows like an appealing ghost. He took her hands, and was affected, almost surprised, to find them so warm, so real, so firm, so living in his grasp. He drew her to him, and she dropped her head on his shoulder with a deep sigh.

"I am dead tired," she whispered plaintively.

He put his arms around her, and only by the convulsive movements of her body became aware that she was sobbing without a sound. Sustaining her, he lost himself in the profound silence of the night. After a while she became still, and cried quietly. Then, suddenly, as if waking up, she asked:

"You haven't seen any more of that somebody you thought was spying about?"

He started at her quick, sharp whisper, and answered that very likely he had been mistaken.

"If it was anybody at all," she reflected aloud, "it wouldn't have been any one but that hotel woman—the landlord's wife."

"Mrs. Schomberg?" Heyst said, surprised.

"Yes. Another one that can't sleep o' nights. Why? Don't you see why? Because, of course, she sees what's going on. That beast doesn't even try to keep it from her. If she had only the least bit of spirit! She knows how I feel, too, only she's too frightened even to look him in the face, let alone open her mouth. He would tell her to go hang herself."

For some time Heyst said nothing. A public, active contest with the hotel-keeper was not to be thought of. The idea was horrible. Whispering gently to the girl, he tried to explain to her that as things stood, an open withdrawal from the company would be probably opposed. She listened to his explanation anxiously, from time to time pressing the hand she had sought and got hold of in the dark.

"As I told you, I am not rich enough to buy you out; so I shall steal you as soon as I can arrange some means of getting away from here. Meantime it would be fatal to be seen together at night. We mustn't give ourselves away. We had better part at once. I think I was mistaken just now; but if, as you say, that poor Mrs. Schomberg can't sleep of nights, we must be more careful. She would tell the fellow."

The girl had disengaged herself from his loose hold while he talked, and now stood free of him, but still clasping his hand firmly.

"Oh, no," she said with perfect assurance. "I tell you she daren't open her mouth to him. And she isn't as silly as she looks. She wouldn't give us away. She knows a trick worth two of that. She'll help—that's what she'll do, if she dares do anything at all."

"You seem to have a very clear view of the situation," said Heyst, and received a warm, lingering kiss for this commendation.

He discovered that to part from her was not such an easy matter as he had supposed it would be.

"Upon my word," he said before they separated, "I don't even know your name."

"Don't you? They call me Alma. I don't know why. Silly name! Magdalen too. It doesn't matter; you can call me by whatever name you choose. Yes, you give me a name. Think of one you would like the sound of—something quite new. How I should like to forget everything that has gone before, as one forgets a dream that's done with, fright and all! I would try."

"Would you really?" he asked in a murmur. "But that's not forbidden. I understand that women easily forget whatever in their past diminishes them in their eyes."

"It's your eyes that I was thinking of, for I'm sure I've never wished to forget anything till you came up to me that night and looked me through and through. I know I'm not much account; but I know how to stand by a man. I stood by father ever since I could understand. He wasn't a bad chap. Now that I can't be of any use to him, I would just as soon forget all that and make a fresh start. But these aren't things that I could talk to you about. What could I ever talk to you about?"

"Don't let it trouble you," Heyst said. "Your voice is enough. I am in love with it, whatever it says."

She remained silent for a while, as if rendered breathless by this quiet statement.

"Oh! I wanted to ask you—"

He remembered that she probably did not know his

name, and expected the question to be put to him now; but after a moment of hesitation she went on:

"Why was it that you told me to smile this evening in the concert-room there—you remember?"

"I thought we were being observed. A smile is the best of masks. Schomberg was at a table next but one to us, drinking with some Dutch clerks from the town. No doubt he was watching us—watching you, at least. That's why I asked you to smile."

"Ah, that's why. It never came into my head."

"And you did it very well, too—very readily, as if you had understood my intention."

"Readily!" she repeated. "Oh, I was ready enough to smile then. That's the truth. It was the first time for years I may say that I felt disposed to smile. I've not had many chances to smile in my life, I can tell you; especially of late."

"But you do it most charmingly—in a perfectly fascinating way."

He paused. She stood still, waiting for more with the stillness of extreme delight, wishing to prolong the sensation.

"It astonished me," he added. "It went as straight to my heart as though you had smiled for the purpose of dazzling me. I felt as if I had never seen a smile before in my life. I thought of it after I left you. It made me restless."

"It did all that?" came her voice, unsteady, gentle, and incredulous.

"If you had not smiled as you did, perhaps I should not have come out here to-night," he said, with his playful earnestness of tone. "It was your triumph."

He felt her lips touch his lightly, and the next moment she was gone. Her white dress gleamed in the distance, and then the opaque darkness of the house seemed to swallow it. Heyst waited a little before he went the same way, round the corner, up the steps of the veranda, and into his room, where he lay down at last—not to sleep, but to go over in his mind all that had been said at their meeting.

"It's exactly true about that smile," he thought. There he had spoken the truth to her; and about her voice, too. For the rest—what must be must be.

A great wave of heat passed over him. He turned on his back, flung his arms crosswise on the broad, hard bed, and lay still, open-eyed under the mosquito net, till daylight entered his room, brightened swiftly, and turned to unfailing sunlight. He got up then, went to a small looking-glass hanging on the wall, and stared at himself steadily. It was not a new-born vanity which induced this long survey. He felt so strange that he could not resist the suspicion of his personal appearance having changed during the night. What he saw in the glass, however, was the man he knew before. It was almost a disappointment—a belittling of his recent experience. And then he smiled at his naïveness; for, being over five and thirty years of age, he ought to have known that in most cases the body is the unalterable mask of the soul, which even death itself changes but little, till it is put out of sight where no changes matter any more, either to our friends or to our enemies.

Heyst was not conscious of either friends or of enemies. It was the very essence of his life to be a solitary achievement, accomplished not by hermit-like withdrawal with its silence and immobility, but by a system of restless wandering, by the detachment of an impermanent dweller amongst changing scenes. In this scheme he had perceived the means of passing through life without suffering and almost without a single care in the world—invulnerable because elusive.

III

FOR fifteen years Heyst had wandered, invariably courteous and unapproachable, and in return was generally considered a "queer chap." He had started off on these travels of his after the death of his father, an expatriated Swede who died in London, dissatisfied

with his country and angry with all the world, which had instinctively rejected his wisdom.

Thinker, stylist, and man of the world in his time, the elder Heyst had begun by coveting all the joys, those of the great and those of the humble, those of the fools and those of the sages. For more than sixty years he had dragged on this painful earth of ours the most weary, the most uneasy soul that civilisation had ever fashioned to its ends of disillusion and regret. One could not refuse him a measure of greatness, for he was unhappy in a way unknown to mediocre souls. His mother Heyst had never known, but he kept his father's pale, distinguished face in affectionate memory. He remembered him mainly in an ample blue dressing-gown in a large house of a quiet London suburb. For three years, after leaving school at the age of eighteen, he had lived with the elder Heyst, who was then writing his last book. In this work, at the end of his life, he claimed for mankind that right to absolute moral and intellectual liberty of which he no longer believed them worthy.

Three years of such companionship at that plastic and impressionable age were bound to leave in the boy a profound mistrust of life. The young man learned to reflect, which is a destructive process, a reckoning of the cost. It is not the clear-sighted who lead the world. Great achievements are accomplished in a blessed, warm mental fog, which the pitiless cold blasts of the father's analysis had blown away from the son.

"I'll drift," Heyst had said to himself deliberately.

He did not mean intellectually or sentimentally or morally. He meant to drift altogether and literally, body and soul, like a detached leaf drifting in the wind-currents under the immovable trees of a forest glade; to drift without ever catching on to anything.

"This shall be my defence against life," he had said to himself with a sort of inward consciousness that for the son of his father there was no other worthy alternative.

He became a waif and stray, austerely, from conviction, as others do through drink, from vice, from some weakness

of character—with deliberation, as others do in despair. This, stripped of its facts, had been Heyst's life up to that disturbing night. Next day, when he saw the girl called Alma, she managed to give him a glance of frank tenderness, quick as lightning, and leaving a profound impression, a secret touch on the heart. It was in the grounds of the hotel, about tiffin time, while the ladies of the orchestra were strolling back to their pavilion after rehearsal, or practice, or whatever they called their morning musical exercises in the hall. Heyst, returning from the town, where he had discovered that there would be difficulties in the way of getting away at once, was crossing the compound, disappointed and worried. He had walked almost unwittingly into the straggling group of Zangiacomo's performers. It was a shock to him, on coming out of his brown study, to find the girl so near him, as if one waking suddenly should see the figure of his dream turned into flesh and blood. She did not raise her shapely head, but her glance was no dream thing. It was real, the most real impression of his detached existence—so far.

Heyst had not acknowledged it in any way, though it seemed to him impossible that its effect on him should not be visible to any one who happened to be looking on. And there were several men on the veranda, steady customers of Schomberg's table d'hôte, gazing in his direction—at the ladies of the orchestra, in fact. Heyst's dread arose, not out of shame or timidity, but from his fastidiousness. On getting amongst them, however, he noticed no signs of interest or astonishment on their faces, any more than if they had been blind men. Even Schomberg himself, who had to make way for him at the top of the stairs, was completely unperturbed, and continued the conversation he was carrying on with a client.

Schomberg, indeed, had observed "that Swede" talking with the girl in the intervals. A crony of his had nudged him; and he had thought that it was so much the better; the silly fellow would keep everybody else off. He was rather pleased than otherwise and watched them out of the corner of his eye with a malicious enjoyment of the

situation—a sort of Satanic glee. For he had little doubt of his personal fascination, and still less of his power to get hold of the girl, who seemed too ignorant to know how to help herself, and who was worse than friendless, since she had for some reason incurred the animosity of Mrs. Zangiacomo, a woman with no conscience. The aversion she showed him as far as she dared (for it is not always safe for the helpless to display the delicacy of their sentiments), Schomberg pardoned on the score of feminine conventional silliness. He had told Alma, as an argument, that she was a clever enough girl to see that she could do no better than to put her trust in a man of substance, in the prime of life, who knew his way about. But for the excited trembling of his voice, and the extraordinary way in which his eyes seemed to be starting out of his crimson, hirsute countenance, such speeches had every character of calm, unselfish advice—which, after the manner of lovers, passed easily into sanguine plans for the future.

"We'll soon get rid of the old woman," he whispered to her hurriedly, with panting ferocity. "Hang her! I've never cared for her. The climate don't suit her; I shall tell her to go to her people in Europe. She will have to go, too! I will see to it. *Eins, zwei*, march! And then we shall sell this hotel and start another somewhere else."

He assured her that he didn't care what he did for her sake; and it was true. Forty-five is the age of recklessness for many men, as if in defiance of the decay and death waiting with open arms in the sinister valley, at the bottom of the inevitable hill. Her shrinking form, her downcast eyes, when she had to listen to him, cornered at the end of an empty corridor, he regarded as signs of submission to the overpowering force of his will, the recognition of his personal fascinations. For every age is fed on illusions, lest men should renounce life early and human race come to an end.

It's easy to imagine Schomberg's humiliation, his shocked fury, when he discovered that the girl who had for weeks resisted his attacks, his prayers, and his fiercest protesta-

tions, had been snatched from under his nose by "that Swede," apparently without any trouble worth speaking of. He refused to believe the fact. He would have it, at first, that the Zangiacomos, for some unfathomable reason, had played him a scurvy trick; but when no further doubt was possible, he changed his view of Heyst. The despised Swede became for Schomberg the deepest, the most dangerous, the most hateful of scoundrels. He could not believe that the creature he had coveted with so much force and with so little effect, was in reality tender, docile to her impulses, and had almost offered herself to Heyst without a sense of guilt, in a desire of safety, and from a profound need of placing her trust where her woman's instinct guided her ignorance. Nothing would serve Schomberg but that she must have been circumvented by some occult exercise of force or craft, by the laying of some subtle trap. His wounded vanity wondered ceaselessly at the means "that Swede" had employed to seduce her away from a man like him—Schomberg—as though those means were bound to have been extraordinary, unheard of, inconceivable. He slapped his forehead openly before his customers; he would sit brooding in silence or else would burst out unexpectedly declaiming against Heyst without measure, discretion or prudence, with swollen features and an affectation of outraged virtue which could not have deceived the most childlike of moralists for a moment—and greatly amused his audience.

It became a recognised entertainment to go and hear his abuse of Heyst, while sipping iced drinks on the veranda of the hotel. It was in a manner a more successful draw than the Zangiacomo concerts had ever been—intervals and all. There was never any difficulty in starting the performer off. Anybody could do it, by almost any distant allusion. As likely as not, he would start his endless denunciations in the very billiard-room where Mrs. Schomberg sat enthroned as usual, swallowing her sobs, concealing her tortures of abject humiliation and terror under her stupid, set, everlasting grin, which, having been provided for her by nature, was an excellent

mask, inasmuch as nothing—not even death itself, perhaps —could tear it away.

But nothing lasts in this world, at least without changing its physiognomy. So, after a few weeks, Schomberg regained his outward calm, as if his indignation had dried up within him. And it was time. He was becoming a bore with his inability to talk of anything else but Heyst's unfitness to be at large, Heyst's wickedness, his wiles, his astuteness, and his criminality. Schomberg no longer pretended to despise him. He could not have done it. After what had happened he could not pretend, even to himself. But his bottled-up indignation was fermenting venomously. At the time of his immoderate loquacity one of his customers, an elderly man, had remarked one evening :

" If that ass keeps on like this, he will end by going crazy."

And this belief was less than half wrong. Schomberg had Heyst on the brain. Even the unsatisfactory state of his affairs, which had never been so unpromising since he came out East directly after the Franco-Prussian War, he referred to some subtly noxious influence of Heyst. It seemed to him that he could never be himself again till he had got even with that artful Swede. He was ready to swear that Heyst had ruined his life. The girl so unfairly, craftily, basely decoyed away would have inspired him to success in a new start. Obviously Mrs. Schomberg, whom he terrified by savagely silent moods combined with underhand, poisoned glances, could give him no inspiration. He had grown generally neglectful, but with a partiality for reckless expedients, as if he did not care when and how his career as a hotel-keeper was to be brought to an end. This demoralised state accounted for what Davidson had observed on his last visit to the Schomberg establishment, some two months after Heyst's secret departure with the girl to the solitude of Samburan.

The Schomberg of a few years ago—the Schomberg of the Bangkok days, for instance, when he started the first of his famed table-d'hôte dinners—would never have risked anything of the sort. His genius ran to cater-

ing, "white man for white men," and to the inventing, elaborating, and retailing of scandalous gossip with asinine unction and impudent delight. But now his mind was perverted by the pangs of wounded vanity and of thwarted passion. In this state of moral weakness Schomberg allowed himself to be corrupted.

IV

THE business was done by a guest who arrived one fine morning by mail-boat—immediately from Celebes, having boarded her in Macassar, but generally, Schomberg understood, from up China Sea way; a wanderer, clearly, even as Heyst was, but not alone and of quite another kind.

Schomberg, looking up from the stern-sheets of his steam-launch, which he used for boarding passenger ships on arrival, discovered a dark, sunken stare plunging down on him over the rail of the first-class part of the deck. He was no great judge of physiognomy. Human beings, for him, were either the objects of scandalous gossip or else the recipients of narrow strips of paper, with proper bill-heads stating the name of his hotel.—"W. Schomberg, proprietor; accounts settled weekly."

So in the clean-shaven, extremely thin face hanging over the mail-boat's rail Schomberg saw only the face of a possible "account." The steam-launches of other hotels were also alongside, but he obtained the preference.

"You are Mr. Schomberg, aren't you?" the face asked quite unexpectedly.

"I am, at your service," he answered from below; for business is business, and its forms and formulas must be observed, even if one's manly bosom is tortured by that dull rage which succeeds the fury of baffled passion, like the glow of embers after a fierce blaze.

Presently the possessor of the handsome but emaciated face was seated beside Schomberg in the stern-sheets of the launch. His body was long and loose-jointed; his

slender fingers, intertwined, clasped the leg resting on his knee, as he lolled back in a careless yet tense attitude. On the other side of Schomberg sat another passenger, who was introduced by the clean-shaven man as—

"My secretary. He must have the room next to mine."

"We can manage that easily for you."

Schomberg steered with dignity, staring straight ahead, but very much interested by these two promising "accounts." Their belongings, a couple of large leather trunks browned by age and a few smaller packages, were piled up in the bows. A third individual—a nondescript, hairy creature—had modestly made his way forward and had perched himself on the luggage. The lower part of his physiognomy was over-developed; his narrow and low forehead, unintelligently furrowed by horizontal wrinkles, surmounted wildly hirsute cheeks and a flat nose with wide, baboon-like nostrils. There was something equivocal in the appearance of his shaggy, hair-smothered humanity. He, too, seemed to be a follower of the clean-shaven man, and apparently had travelled on deck with native passengers, sleeping under the awnings. His broad, squat frame denoted great strength. Grasping the gunwales of the launch, he displayed a pair of remarkably long arms, terminating in thick, brown, hairy paws of simian aspect.

"What shall we do with that fellow of mine?" the chief of the party asked Schomberg. "There must be a boarding-house somewhere near the port—some grog-shop where they could let him have a mat to sleep on?"

Schomberg said there was a place kept by a Portuguese half-caste.

"A servant of yours?" he asked.

"Well, he hangs on to me. He is an alligator-hunter. I picked him up in Colombia, you know. Ever been in Colombia?"

"No," said Schomberg, very much surprised. "An alligator-hunter? Funny trade! Are you coming from Colombia, then?"

"Yes, but I have been coming for a long time. I come

from a good many places. I am travelling west, you see."

"For sport, perhaps?" suggested Schomberg.

"Yes. Sort of sport. What do you say to chasing the sun?"

"I see—a gentleman at large," said Schomberg, watching a sailing canoe about to cross his bow, and ready to clear it by a touch of the helm.

The other passenger made himself heard suddenly.

"Hang these native craft! They always get in the way."

He was a muscular, short man with eyes that gleamed and blinked, a harsh voice, and a round, toneless, pock-marked face ornamented by a thin, dishevelled moustache sticking out quaintly under the tip of a rigid nose. Schomberg made the reflection that there was nothing secretarial about him. Both he and his long, lank principal wore the usual white suit of the tropics, cork helmets, pipe-clayed white shoes—all correct. The hairy nondescript creature perched on their luggage in the bow had a check shirt and blue dungaree trousers. He gazed in their direction from forward in an expectant, trained-animal manner.

"You spoke to me first," said Schomberg in his manly tones. "You were acquainted with my name. Where did you hear of me, gentlemen, may I ask?"

"In Manila," answered the gentleman at large, readily. "From a man with whom I had a game of cards one evening in the Hotel Castille."

"What man? I've no friends in Manila that I know of," wondered Schomberg with a severe frown.

"I can't tell you his name. I've clean forgotten it; but don't you worry. He was anything but a friend of yours. He called you all the names he could think of. He said you set a lot of scandal going about him once, somewhere—in Bangkok, I think. Yes, that's it. You were running a table d'hôte in Bangkok at one time, weren't you?"

Schomberg, astounded by the turn of the information, could only throw out his chest more and exaggerate

his austere Lieutenant-of-the-Reserve manner. A table d'hôte? Yes, certainly. He always—for the sake of white men. And here in this place, too? Yes, in this place, too.

"That's all right, then." The stranger turned his black, cavernous, mesmerising glance away from the bearded Schomberg, who sat gripping the brass tiller in a sweating palm. "Many people in the evening at your place?"

Schomberg had recovered somewhat.

"Twenty covers or so, take one day with another," he answered feelingly, as befitted a subject on which he was sensitive. "Ought to be more, if only people would see that it's for their own good. Precious little profit I get out of it. You are partial to table d'hôtes, gentlemen?"

The new guest made answer that he liked a hotel where one could find some local people in the evening. It was infernally dull otherwise. The secretary, in sign of approval, emitted a grunt of astonishing ferocity, as if proposing to himself to eat the local people. All this sounded like a longish stay, thought Schomberg, satisfied under his grave air; till, remembering the girl snatched away from him by the last guest who had made a prolonged stay in his hotel, he ground his teeth so audibly that the other two looked at him in wonder. The momentary convulsion of his florid physiognomy seemed to strike them dumb. They exchanged a quick glance. Presently the clean-shaven man fired out another question in his curt, unceremonious manner:

"You have no women in your hotel, eh?"

"Women!" Schomberg exclaimed indignantly, but also as if a little frightened. "What on earth do you mean by women? What women? There's Mrs. Schomberg, of course," he added, suddenly appeased, with lofty indifference.

"If she knows how to keep her place, then it will do. I can't stand women near me. They give me the horrors," declared the other. "They are a perfect curse!"

During this outburst the secretary wore a savage grin.

The chief guest closed his sunken eyes, as if exhausted, and leaned the back of his head against the stanchion of the awning. In this pose, his long, feminine eyelashes were very noticeable, and his regular features, sharp line of the jaw, and well-cut chin were brought into prominence, giving him a used-up, weary, depraved distinction. He did not open his eyes till the steam-launch touched the quay. Then he and the other man got ashore quickly, entered a carriage, and drove away to the hotel, leaving Schomberg to look after their luggage and take care of their strange companion. The latter, looking more like a performing bear abandoned by his showmen than a human being, followed all Schomberg's movements step by step, close behind his back, muttering to himself in a language that sounded like some sort of uncouth Spanish. The hotel-keeper felt uncomfortable till at last he got rid of him at an obscure den where a very clean, portly Portuguese half-caste, standing serenely in the doorway, seemed to understand exactly how to deal with clients of every kind. He took from the creature the strapped bundle it had been hugging closely through all its peregrinations in that strange town, and cut short Schomberg's attempts at explanation by a most confident—

"I comprehend very well, sir."

"It's more than I do," thought Schomberg, going away thankful at being relieved of the alligator-hunter's company. He wondered what these fellows were, without being able to form a guess of sufficient probability. Their names he learned that very day by direct inquiry—"to enter in my books," he explained in his formal military manner, chest thrown out, beard very much in evidence.

The shaven man, sprawling in a long chair, with his air of withered youth, raised his eyes languidly.

"My name? Oh, plain Mr. Jones—put that down—a gentleman at large. And this is Ricardo." The pock-marked man, lying prostrate in another long chair, made a grimace, as if something had tickled the end of his nose, but did not come out of his supineness. "Martin Ricardo, secretary. You don't want any more of our history, do you? Eh, what? Occupation? Put down,

well—tourists. We've been called harder names before now; it won't hurt our feelings. And that fellow of mine—where did you tuck him away? Oh, he will be all right. When he wants anything he'll take it. He's Peter. Citizen of Colombia, Peter, Pedro—I don't know that he ever had any other name. Pedro, alligator-hunter. Oh, yes—I'll pay his board with the half-caste. Can't help myself. He's so confoundedly devoted to me that if I were to give him the sack he would fly at my throat. Shall I tell you how I killed his brother in the wilds of Colombia? Well, perhaps some other time—it's a rather long story. What I shall always regret is that I didn't kill him, too. I could have done it without any extra trouble then; now it's too late. Great nuisance; but he's useful sometimes. I hope you are not going to put all this in your book?"

The offhand, hard manner and the contemptuous tone of "plain Mr. Jones" disconcerted Schomberg utterly. He had never been spoken to like this in his life. He shook his head in silence and withdrew, not exactly scared—though he was in reality of a timid disposition under his manly exterior—but distinctly mystified and impressed.

V

THREE weeks later, after putting his cash-box away in the safe which filled with its iron bulk a corner of their bedroom, Schomberg turned toward his wife, but without looking at her exactly, and said:

"I must get rid of these two. It won't do!"

Mrs. Schomberg had entertained that very opinion from the first; but she had been broken years ago into keeping her opinions to herself. Sitting in her night attire in the light of a single candle, she was careful not to make a sound, knowing from experience that her very assent would be resented. With her eyes she followed the figure of Schomberg, clad in his sleeping suit, and moving restlessly about the room.

He never glanced her way, for the reason that Mrs. Schomberg, in her night attire, looked the most unattractive object in existence—miserable, insignificant, faded, crushed, old. And the contrast with the feminine form he had ever in his mind's eye made his wife's appearance painful to his esthetic sense.

Schomberg walked about swearing and fuming for the purpose of screwing his courage up to the sticking point.

"Hang me if I ought not to go now, at once, this minute, into his bedroom, and tell him to be off—him and that secretary of his—early in the morning. I don't mind a round game of cards, but to make a decoy of my table d'hôte—my blood boils! He came here because some lying rascal in Manila told him I kept a table d'hôte."

He said these things, not for Mrs. Schomberg's information, but simply thinking aloud, and trying to work his fury up to a point where it would give him courage enough to face "plain Mr. Jones."

"Impudent, overbearing, swindling sharper," he went on. "I have a good mind to—"

He was beside himself in his lurid, heavy, Teutonic manner, so unlike the picturesque, lively rage of the Latin races; and though his eyes strayed about irresolutely, yet his swollen, angry features awakened in the miserable woman over whom he had been tryannising for years a fear for his precious carcass, since the poor creature had nothing else but that to hold on to in the world. She knew him well; but she did not know him altogether. The last thing a woman will consent to discover in a man whom she loves, or on whom she simply depends, is want of courage. And, timid in her corner, she ventured to say pressingly:

"Be careful, Wilhelm! Remember the knives and revolvers in their trunks."

In guise of thanks for that anxious reminder, he swore horribly in the direction of her shrinking person. In her scanty night-dress, and barefooted, she recalled a mediæval penitent being reproved for her sins in blasphemous terms. Those lethal weapons were always present to Schom-

berg's mind. Personally, he had never seen them. His part, ten days after his guests' arrival, had been to lounge in manly, careless attitudes on the veranda—keeping watch —while Mrs. Schomberg, provided with a bunch of assorted keys, her discoloured teeth chattering and her globular eyes absolutely idiotic with fright, was "going through" the luggage of these strange clients. Her terrible Wilhelm had insisted on it.

"I'll be on the look-out, I tell you," he said. "I shall give you a whistle when I see them coming back. You couldn't whistle. And if he were to catch you at it, and chuck you out by the scruff of the neck, it wouldn't hurt you much; but he won't touch a woman. Not he! He has told me so. Affected beast. I must find out something about their little game, and so there's an end of it. Go in! Go now! Quick march!"

It had been an awful job; but she did go in, because she was much more afraid of Schomberg than of any possible consequences of the act. Her greatest concern was lest no key of the bunch he had provided her with should fit the locks. It would have been such a disappointment for Wilhelm. However, the trunks, she found, had been left open; but her investigation did not last long. She was frightened of firearms, and generally of all weapons, not from personal cowardice, but as some women are, almost superstitiously, from an abstract horror of violence and murder. She was out again on the veranda long before Wilhelm had any occasion for a warning whistle. The instinctive, motiveless fear being the most difficult to overcome, nothing could induce her to return to her investigations, neither threatening growls nor ferocious hisses, nor yet a poke or two in the ribs.

"Stupid female!" muttered the hotel-keeper, perturbed by the notion of that armoury in one of his bedrooms. This was from no abstract sentiment; with him it was constitutional. "Get out of my sight!" he snarled. "Go and dress yourself for the table d'hôte."

Left to himself, Schomberg had meditated. What the devil did this mean? His thinking processes were sluggish and spasmodic; but suddenly the truth came to him.

"By heavens, they are desperadoes!" he thought.

Just then he beheld "plain Mr. Jones" and his secretary with the ambiguous name of Ricardo entering the grounds of the hotel. They had been down to the port on some business, and now were returning; Mr. Jones lank, spare, opening his long legs with angular regularity like a pair of compasses, the other stepping out briskly by his side. Conviction entered Schomberg's heart. They *were* two desperadoes—no doubt about it. But as the funk which he experienced was merely a general sensation, he managed to put on his most severe Officer-of-the-Reserve manner, long before they had closed in with him.

"Good morning, gentlemen."

Being answered with derisive civility, he became confirmed in his sudden conviction of their desperate character. The way Mr. Jones turned his hollow eyes on one, like an incurious spectre, and the way the other, when addressed, suddenly retracted his lips and exhibited his teeth without looking round—here was evidence enough to settle that point. Desperadoes! They passed through the billiard-room, inscrutably mysterious, to the back of the house, to join their violated trunks.

"Tiffin bell will ring in five minutes, gentlemen," Schomberg called after them, exaggerating the deep manliness of his tone.

He had managed to upset himself very much. He expected to see them come back infuriated and begin to bully him with an odious lack of restraint. Desperadoes! However they didn't; they had not noticed anything unusual about their trunks and Schomberg recovered his composure and said to himself that he must get rid of this deadly incubus as soon as practicable. They couldn't possibly want to stay very long; this was not the town—the colony—for desperate characters. He shrank from action. He dreaded any kind of disturbance—"fracas," he called it—in his hotel. Such things were not good for business. Of course, sometimes one had to have a "fracas"; but it had been a comparatively trifling task to seize the frail Zangiacomo—whose bones were no larger than a chicken's—round the ribs, lift him up bodily, dash

him to the ground, and fall on him. It had been easy. The wretched, hook-nosed creature lay without movement, buried under its purple beard.

Suddenly, remembering the occasion of that "fracas," Schomberg groaned with the pain as of a hot coal under his breastbone, and gave himself up to desolation. Ah, if he only had that girl with him he would have been masterful and resolute and fearless—fight twenty desperadoes—care for nobody on earth! Whereas the possession of Mrs. Schomberg was no incitement to a display of manly virtues. Instead of caring for no one, he felt that he cared for nothing. Life was a hollow sham; he wasn't going to risk a shot through his lungs or his liver in order to preserve its integrity. It had no savour—damn it!

In his state of moral decomposition, Schomberg, master as he was of the art of hotel-keeping, and careful of giving no occasion for criticism to the powers regulating that branch of human activities, let things take their course; though he saw very well where that course was tending. It began first with a game or two after dinner—for the drinks, apparently—with some lingering customer, at one of the little tables ranged against the walls of the billiard-room. Schomberg detected the meaning of it at once. That's what it was! This was what they were! And, moving about restlessly (at that time his morose silent period had set in), he cast sidelong looks at the game; but he said nothing. It was not worth while having a row with men who were so overbearing. Even when money appeared in connection with these post-prandial games, into which more and more people were being drawn, he still refrained from raising the question; he was reluctant to draw unduly the attention of "plain Mr. Jones" and of the equivocal Ricardo, to his person. One evening, however, after the public rooms of the hotel had become empty, Schomberg made an attempt to grapple with the problem in an indirect way.

In a distant corner the tired China boy dozed on his heels, his back against the wall. Mrs. Schomberg had disappeared, as usual, between ten and eleven. Schomberg walked about slowly, in and out of the room and the

veranda, thoughtful, waiting for his two guests to go to bed. Then suddenly he approached them, militarily, his chest thrown out, his voice curt and soldierly.

"Hot night, gentlemen."

Mr. Jones, lolling back idly in a chair, looked up. Ricardo, as idle, but more upright, made no sign.

"Won't you have a drink with me before retiring?" went on Schomberg, sitting down by the little table.

"By all means," said Mr. Jones lazily.

Ricardo showed his teeth in a strange, quick grin. Schomberg felt painfully how difficult it was to get in touch with these men, both so quiet, so deliberate, so menacingly unceremonious. He ordered the Chinaman to bring in the drinks. His purpose was to discover how long these guests intended to stay. Ricardo displayed no conversational vein, but Mr. Jones appeared communicative enough. His voice somehow matched his sunken eyes. It was hollow without being in the least mournful; it sounded distant, uninterested, as though he were speaking from the bottom of a well. Schomberg learned that he would have the privilege of lodging and boarding these gentlemen for at least a month more. He could not conceal his discomfiture at this piece of news.

"What's the matter? Don't you like to have people in your house?" asked plain Mr. Jones languidly. "I should have thought the owner of a hotel would be pleased."

He lifted his delicate and beautifully pencilled eyebrows. Schomberg muttered something about the locality being dull and uninteresting to travellers—nothing going on—too quiet altogether; but he only provoked the declaration that quiet had its charms sometimes, and even dulness was welcome as a change.

"We haven't had time to be dull for the last three years," added plain Mr. Jones, his eyes fixed darkly on Schomberg, whom he furthermore invited to have another drink, this time with him, and not to worry himself about things he did not understand; and especially not to be inhospitable—which in a hotel-keeper was highly unprofessional.

"I don't understand," grumbled Schomberg. "Oh, yes, I understand perfectly well. I—"

"You are frightened," interrupted Mr. Jones. "What *is* the matter?"

"I don't want any scandal in my place. That's what's the matter."

Schomberg tried to face the situation bravely, but that steady, black stare affected him. And when he glanced aside uncomfortably, he met Ricardo's grin uncovering a lot of teeth, though the man seemed absorbed in his thoughts all the time.

"And, moreover," went on Mr. Jones in that distant tone of his, "you can't help yourself. Here we are and here we stay. Would you try to put us out? I dare say you could do it; but you couldn't do it without getting badly hurt—very badly hurt. We can promise him that, can't we, Martin?"

The secretary retracted his lips and looked up sharply at Schomberg, as if only too anxious to leap upon him with teeth and claws.

Schomberg managed to produce a deep laugh.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Mr. Jones closed his eyes wearily, as if the light hurt them, and looked remarkably like a corpse for a moment. This was bad enough; but when he opened them again, it was almost a worse trial for Schomberg's nerves. The spectral intensity of that glance, fixed on the hotel-keeper (and this was most frightful), without any definite expression, seemed to dissolve the last grain of resolution in his character.

"You don't think, by any chance, that you have to do with ordinary people, do you?" inquired Mr. Jones, in his lifeless manner, which seemed to imply some sort of menace from beyond the grave.

"He's a gentleman," testified Martin Ricardo with a sudden snap of the lips, after which his moustaches stirred by themselves in an odd, feline manner.

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of that," said plain Mr. Jones, while Schomberg, dumb and planted heavily in his chair, looked from one to the other, leaning forward a little. "Of

course I am that; but Ricardo attaches too much importance to a social advantage. What I mean, for instance' is that he, quiet and inoffensive as you see him sitting here, would think nothing of setting fire to this house of entertainment of yours. It would blaze like a box of matches. Think of that! It wouldn't advance your affairs much, would it?—whatever happened to us."

"Come, come, gentlemen," remonstrated Schomberg in a murmur. "This is very wild talk!"

"And you have been used to deal with tame people, haven't you? But we aren't tame. We once kept a whole angry town at bay for two days, and then we got away with our plunder. It was in Venezuela. Ask Martin here—he can tell you."

Instinctively Schomberg looked at Ricardo, who only passed the tip of his tongue over his lips with an uncanny sort of gusto, but did not offer to begin.

"Well, perhaps it would be a rather long story," Mr. Jones conceded after a short silence.

"I have no desire to hear it, I am sure," said Schomberg. "This isn't Venezuela. You wouldn't get away from here like that. But all this is silly talk of the worst sort. Do you mean to say you would make deadly trouble for the sake of a few guilders that you and that other"—eyeing Ricardo suspiciously, as one would look at a strange animal—"gentleman can win of an evening? 'Tisn't as if my customers were a lot of rich men with pockets full of cash. I wonder you take so much trouble and risk for so little money."

Schomberg's argument was met by Mr. Jones's statement that one must do something to kill time. Killing time was not forbidden. For the rest, being in a communicative mood, Mr. Jones said languidly and in a voice indifferent, as if issuing from a tomb, that he depended on himself, as if the world were still one great, wild jungle without law. Martin was something like that, too—for reasons of his own.

All these statements Ricardo confirmed by short, inhuman grins. Schomberg lowered his eyes, for the sight of these two men intimidated him; but he was losing patience.

"Of course, I could see at once that you were two desperate characters—something like what you say. But what would you think if I told you that I am pretty near as desperate as you two gentlemen? 'Here's that Schomberg has an easy time running his hotel,' people think; and yet it seems to me I would just as soon let you rip me open and burn the whole show as not. There!"

A low whistle was heard. It came from Ricardo, and was derisive. Schomberg, breathing heavily, looked on the floor. He was really desperate. Mr. Jones remained languidly sceptical.

"Tut, tut! You have a tolerable business. You are perfectly tame; you—" He paused, then added in a tone of disgust: "You have a wife."

Schomberg tapped the floor angrily with his foot and uttered an indistinct, laughing curse.

"What do you mean by flinging that damned trouble at my head?" he cried. "I wish you would carry her off with you somewhere to the devil! I wouldn't run after you."

The unexpected outburst affected Mr. Jones strangely. He had a horrified recoil, chair and all, as if Schomberg had thrust a wriggling viper in his face.

"What's this infernal nonsense?" he muttered thickly. "What do you mean? How dare you?"

Ricardo chuckled audibly.

"I tell you I am desperate," Schomberg repeated. "I am as desperate as any man ever was. I don't care a hang what happens to me!"

"Well, then"—Mr. Jones began to speak with a quietly threatening effect, as if the common words of daily use had some other deadly meaning to his mind—"well then, why should you make yourself ridiculously disagreeable to us? If you don't care, as you say, you might just as well let us have the key of that music-shed of yours for a quiet game; a modest bank—a dozen candles or so. It would be greatly appreciated by your clients, as far as I can judge from the way they betted on a game of écarté I had with that fair, baby-faced man—what's his name? They just yearn for a modest bank. And I am afraid Martin here

would take it badly if you objected; but of course you won't. Think of the calls for drinks!"

Schomberg, raising his eyes, at last met the gleams in two dark caverns under Mr. Jones's devilish eyebrows, directed upon him impenetrably. He shuddered as if horrors worse than murder had been lurking there, and said, nodding toward Ricardo:

"I dare say he wouldn't think twice about sticking me, if he had you at his back! I wish I had sunk my launch, and gone to the bottom myself in her, before I boarded the steamer you came by. Ah, well, I've been already living in hell for weeks, so you don't make much difference. I'll let you have the concert-room—and hang the consequences. But what about the boy on late duty? If he sees cards and actual money passing, he will be sure to blab, and it will be all over the town in no time."

A ghastly smile stirred the lips of Mr. Jones.

"Ah, I see you want to make a success of it. Very good. That's the way to get on. Don't let it disturb you. You chase all the Chinamen to bed early, and we'll get Pedro here every evening. He isn't the conventional waiter's cut, but he will do to run to and fro with the tray, while you sit here from nine to eleven serving out drinks and gathering the money."

"There will be three of them now," thought the unlucky Schomberg.

But Pedro, at any rate, was just a simple, straightforward brute, if a murderous one. There was no mystery about him, nothing uncanny, no suggestion of a stealthy, deliberate wild-cat turned into a man, or of an insolent spectre on leave from Hades, endowed with skin and bones and a subtle power of terror. Pedro with his fangs, his tangled beard and queer stare of his little bear's eyes was, by comparison, delightfully natural. Besides, Schomberg could no longer help himself.

"That will do very well," he assented mournfully. "But mind, gentlemen, if you had turned up here only three months ago—ay, less than three months ago—you would have found somebody very different from what I am now to talk to you. It's true. What do you think of that?"

"I scarcely know what to think. I should think it was a lie. You were probably as tame three months ago as you are now. You were born tame, like most people in the world."

Mr. Jones got up spectrally, and Ricardo imitated him with a snarl and a stretch. Schomberg, in a brown study, went on, as if to himself:

"There has been an orchestra here—eighteen women."

Mr. Jones let out an exclamation of dismay, and looked about as if the walls around him and the whole house had been infected with plague. Then he became very angry, and swore violently at Schomberg for daring to bring up such subjects. The hotel-keeper was too much surprised to get up. He gazed from his chair at Mr. Jones's anger, which had nothing spectral in it, but was not the more comprehensible for that.

"What's the matter?" he stammered out. "What subject? Didn't you hear me say it was an orchestra? There's nothing wrong in that. Well, there was a girl amongst them—" Schomberg's eyes went stony; he clasped his hands in front of his breast with such force that his knuckles came out white. "Such a girl! Tame, am I? I would have kicked everything to pieces about me for her. And she, of course. . . . I am in the prime of life. . . . Then a fellow bewitched her—a vagabond, a false, lying, swindling, underhand, stick-at-nothing brute. Ah!"

His entwined fingers cracked as he tore his hands apart, flung out his arms, and leaned his forehead on them in a passion of fury. The other two looked at his shaking back—the attenuated Mr. Jones with mingled scorn and a sort of fear, Ricardo with the expression of a cat which sees a piece of fish in the pantry out of reach. Schomberg flung himself backwards. He was dry-eyed, but he gulped as if swallowing sobs.

"No wonder you can do with me what you like. You have no idea—just let me tell you of my trouble—"

"I don't want to know anything of your beastly trouble," said Mr. Jones, in his most lifelessly positive voice.

He stretched forth an arresting hand, and, as Schomberg

remained open-mouthed, he walked out of the billiard-room in all the uncanniness of his thin shanks. Ricardo followed at his leader's heels; but he showed his teeth to Schomberg over his shoulder.

VI

FROM that evening dated those mysterious but significant phenomena in Schomberg's establishment which attracted Captain Davidson's casual notice when he dropped in, placid yet astute, in order to return Mrs. Schomberg's Indian shawl. And, strangely enough, they lasted some considerable time. It argued either honesty and bad luck or extraordinary restraint on the part of "plain Mr. Jones and Co." in their discreet operations with cards.

It was a curious and impressive sight, the inside of Schomberg's concert-hall, encumbered at one end by a great stack of chairs piled up on and about the musicians' platform, and lighted at the other by two dozen candles disposed about a long trestle table covered with green cloth. In the middle, Mr. Jones, a starved spectre turned into a banker, faced Ricardo, a rather nasty, slow-moving cat turned into a croupier. By contrast, the other faces round that table, anything between twenty and thirty, must have looked like collected samples of intensely artless, helpless humanity—pathetic in their innocent watch for the small turns of luck which indeed might have been serious enough for them. They had no notice to spare for the hairy Pedro, carrying a tray with the clumsiness of a creature caught in the woods and taught to walk on its hind legs.

As to Schomberg, he kept out of the way. He remained in the billiard-room, serving out drinks to the unspeakable Pedro with an air of not seeing the growling monster, of not knowing where the drinks went, of ignoring that there was such a thing as a music-room over there under the trees within fifty yards of the hotel. He submitted

himself to the situation with a low-spirited stoicism compounded of fear and resignation. Directly the party had broken up (he could see dark shapes of the men drifting singly and in knots through the gate of the compound), he would withdraw out of sight behind a door not quite closed, in order to avoid meeting his two extraordinary guests; but he would watch through the crack their contrasted forms pass through the billiard-room and disappear on their way to bed. Then he would hear doors being slammed upstairs; and a profound silence would fall upon the whole house, upon his hotel appropriated, haunted by those insolently outspoken men provided with a whole armoury of weapons in their trunks. A profound silence. Schomberg sometimes could not resist the notion that he must be dreaming. Shuddering, he would pull himself together, and creep out, with movements strangely inappropriate to the Lieutenant-of-the-Reserve bearing by which he tried to keep up his self-respect before the world.

A great loneliness oppressed him. One after another he would extinguish the lamps, and move softly toward his bedroom, where Mrs. Schomberg waited for him—no fit companion for a man of his ability and "in the prime of life." But that life, alas, was blighted. He felt it; and never with such force as when on opening the door he perceived that woman sitting patiently in a chair, her toes peeping out under the edge of her night-dress, an amazingly small amount of hair on her head drooping on the long stalk of scraggy neck, with that everlasting scared grin showing a blue tooth and meaning nothing—not ever real fear. For she was used to him.

Sometimes he was tempted to screw the head off the stalk. He imagined himself doing it—with one hand, a twisting movement. Not seriously, of course. Just a simple indulgence for his exasperated feelings. He wasn't capable of murder. He was certain of that. And, remembering suddenly the plain speeches of Mr. Jones, he would think: "I suppose I *am* too tame for that"—quite unaware that he had murdered the poor woman morally years ago. He was too unintelligent to have the

notion of such a crime. Her bodily presence was bitterly offensive, because of its contrast with a very different feminine image. And it was no use getting rid of her. She was a habit of years, and there would be nothing to put in her place. At any rate, he could talk to that idiot half the night if he chose.

That night he had been vapouring before her as to his intention to face his two guests and, instead of that inspiration he needed, had merely received the usual warning: "Be careful, Wilhelm." He did not want to be told to be careful by an imbecile female. What he needed was a pair of woman's arms which, flung round his neck, would brace him up for the encounter. Inspire him, he called it to himself.

He lay awake a long time; and his slumbers, when they came, were unsatisfactory and short. The morning light had no joy for his eyes. He listened dismally to the movements in the house. The Chinamen were unlocking and flinging wide the doors of the public rooms which opened on the veranda. Horrors! Another poisoned day to get through somehow! The recollection of his resolve made him feel actually sick for a moment. First of all the lordly, abandoned attitudes of Mr. Jones disconcerted him. Then there was his contemptuous silence. Mr. Jones never addressed himself to Schomberg with any general remarks, never opened his lips to him unless to say "Good morning"—two simple words which, uttered by that man, seemed a mockery of a threatening character. And, lastly, it was not a frank physical fear he inspired—for, as to that, even a cornered rat will fight—but a superstitious, shrinking awe, something like an invincible repugnance to seek speech with a wicked ghost. That it was a daylight ghost, surprisingly angular in his attitudes, and for the most part spread out on three chairs, did not make it any easier. Daylight only made him a more weird, a more disturbing and unlawful apparition. Strangely enough, in the evening, when he came out of his mute supineness, this unearthly side of him was less obtrusive. At the gaming-table, when actually handling the cards, it was probably sunk quite out of sight; but

Schomberg, having made up his mind in ostrich-like fashion to ignore what was going on, never entered the desecrated music-room. He had never seen Mr. Jones in the exercise of his vocation—or perhaps it was only his trade.

"I will speak to him to-night," Schomberg said to himself, while he drank his morning tea, in pyjamas, on the veranda, before the rising sun had topped the trees of the compound, and while the undried dew still lay silvery on the grass, sparkled on the blossoms of the central flower-bed, and darkened the yellow gravel of the drive. "That's what I'll do. I won't keep out of sight to-night. I shall come out and catch him as he goes to bed carrying the cash-box."

After all, what was the fellow but a common desperado? Murderous? Oh, yes; murderous enough, perhaps—and the muscles of Schomberg's stomach had a quivering contraction under his airy attire. But even a common desperado would think twice, or, more likely, a hundred times, before openly murdering an inoffensive citizen in a civilised, European-ruled town. He jerked his shoulders. Of course! He shuddered again, and paddled back to his room to dress himself. His mind was made up, and he would think no more about it; but still he had his doubts. They grew and unfolded themselves with the progress of the day, as some plants do. At times they made him perspire more than usual, and they did away with the possibility of his afternoon siesta. After turning over on his couch more than a dozen times, he gave up this mockery of repose, got up, and went downstairs.

It was between three and four o'clock, the hour of profound peace. The very flowers seemed to doze on their stalks set with sleepy leaves. Not even the air stirred, for the sea-breeze was not due till later. The servants were out of sight, catching naps in the shade somewhere behind the house. Mrs. Schomberg, in a dim up-stair room with closed jalousies, was elaborating those two long pendant ringlets which were such a feature of her hair-dressing for her afternoon duties. At that time no customers ever troubled the repose of the establishment. Wandering about his premises in profound solitude,

Schomberg recoiled at the door of the billiard-room, as if he had seen a snake in his path. All alone with the billiards, the bare little tables, and a lot of untenanted chairs, Mr. Secretary Ricardo sat near the wall, performing with lightning rapidity something that looked like tricks with his own personal pack of cards, which he always carried about in his pocket. Schomberg would have backed out quietly if Ricardo had not turned his head. Having been seen, the hotel-keeper elected to walk in as the lesser risk of the two. The consciousness of his inwardly abject attitude toward these men caused him always to throw his chest out and assume a severe expression. Ricardo watched his approach, clasping the pack of cards in both hands.

"You want something, perhaps?" suggested Schomberg in his Lieutenant-of-the-Reserve voice.

Ricardo shook his head in silence and looked expectant. With him Schomberg exchanged at least twenty words every day. He was infinitely more communicative than his patron. At times he looked very much like an ordinary human being of his class; and he seemed to be in an amiable mood at that moment. Suddenly spreading some ten cards face downward in the form of a fan, he thrust them toward Schomberg.

"Come, man, take one quick!"

Schomberg was so surprised that he took one hurriedly, after a very perceptible start. The eyes of Martin Ricardo gleamed phosphorescent in the half-light of the room screened from the heat and glare of the tropics.

"That's a king of hearts you've got," he chuckled, showing his teeth in a quick flash.

Schomberg, after looking at the card, admitted that it was, and laid it down on the table.

"I can make you take any card I like nine times out of ten," exulted the secretary, with a strange curl of his lips and a green flicker in his raised eyes.

Schomberg looked down at him dumbly. For a few seconds neither of them stirred; then Ricardo lowered his glance, and, opening his fingers, let the whole pack fall on the table. Schomberg sat down. He sat down

because of the faintness in his legs, and for no other reason. His mouth was dry. Having sat down, he felt that he must speak. He squared his shoulders in parade style.

"You are pretty good at that sort of thing," he said.

"Practice makes perfect," replied the secretary.

His precarious amiability made it impossible for Schomberg to get away. Thus, from his very timidity, the hotel-keeper found himself engaged in a conversation the thought of which had filled him with apprehension. It must be said, in justice to Schomberg, that he concealed his funk very creditably. The habit of throwing out his chest and speaking in a severe voice stood him in good stead. With him, too, practice made perfect; and he would probably have kept it up to the end, to the very last moment, to the ultimate instant of breaking strain which would leave him grovelling on the floor. To add to his secret trouble, he was at a loss what to say. He found nothing else but the remark:

"I suppose you are fond of cards."

"What would you expect?" asked Ricardo in a simple philosophical tone. "Is it likely I should not be?" Then, with sudden fire: "Fond of cards? Ay, passionately!"

The effect of this outburst was augmented by the quiet lowering of the eyelids, by a reserved pause as though this had been a confession of another kind of love. Schomberg cudgelled his brains for a new topic, but he could not find one. His usual scandalous gossip would not serve this turn. That desperado did not know any one anywhere within a thousand miles. Schomberg was almost compelled to keep to the subject.

"I suppose you've always been so—from your early youth."

Ricardo's eyes remained cast down. His fingers toyed absently with the pack on the table.

"I don't know that it was so early. I first got in the way of it playing for tobacco—in forecastles of ships, you know—common sailor games. We used to spend whole watches below at it, round a chest, under a slush lamp. We would hardly spare the time to get a bite of salt horse—

neither eat nor sleep. We could hardly stand when the watches were mustered on deck. Talk of gambling!" He dropped the reminiscent tone to add the information, "I was bred to the sea from a boy, you know."

Schomberg had fallen into a reverie, but without losing the sense of impending calamity. The next words he heard were:

"I got on all right at sea, too. Worked up to be mate. I was mate of a schooner—a yacht, you might call her—a special good berth too, in the Gulf of Mexico, a soft job that you don't run across more than once in a lifetime. Yes, I was mate of her when I left the sea to follow him."

Ricardo tossed up his chin to indicate the room above; from which Schomberg, his wits painfully aroused by this reminder of Mr. Jones's existence, concluded that the latter had withdrawn into his bedroom. Ricardo, observing him from under lowered eyelids, went on:

"It so happened that we were shipmates."

"Mr. Jones, you mean? Is he a sailor too?'

Ricardo raised his eyelids at that.

"He's no more Mr. Jones than you are," he said with obvious pride. "He a sailor! That just shows your ignorance. But there! A foreigner can't be expected to know any better. I am an Englishman, and I know a gentleman at sight. I should know one drunk, in the gutter, in jail, under the gallows. There's a something—it isn't exactly the appearance, it's a—no use me trying to tell you. You ain't an Englishman; and if you were, you wouldn't need to be told."

An unsuspected stream of loquacity had broken its dam somewhere deep within the man, had diluted his fiery blood and softened his pitiless fibre. Schomberg experienced mingled relief and apprehension, as if suddenly an enormous savage cat had begun to wind itself about his legs in inexplicable friendliness. No prudent man under such circumstances would dare to stir. Schomberg didn't stir. Ricardo assumed an easy attitude with an elbow on the table. Schomberg squared his shoulders afresh.

"I was employed, in that there yacht—schooner, what-

ever you call it—by ten gentlemen at once. That surprises you, eh? Yes, yes, ten. Leastwise there were nine of them gents good enough in their way, and one downright gentleman, and that was . . ."

Ricardo gave another upward jerk of his chin as much as to say: He! The only one.

"And no mistake," he went on. "I spotted him from the first day. How? Why? Ay, you may ask. I hadn't seen that many gentlemen in my life. Well, somehow I did. If you were an Englishman, you would—"

"What was your yacht?" Schomberg interrupted as impatiently as he dared; for this harping on nationality jarred on his already tried nerves. "What was the game?"

"You have a headpiece on you! Game! 'Xactly. That's what it was—the sort of silliness gentlemen will get up among themselves to play at adventure. A treasure-hunting expedition. Each of them put down so much money, you understand, to buy the schooner. Their agent in the city engaged me and the skipper. The greatest secrecy and all that. I reckon he had a twinkle in his eye all the time—and no mistake. But that wasn't our business. Let them bust their money as they like. The pity of it was that so little of it came our way. Just fair pay, and no more. And damn any pay, much or little, anyhow—that's what I say!"

He blinked his eyes greenishly in the dim light. The heat seemed to have stilled everything in the world but his voice. He swore at large, abundantly, in snarling undertones, it was impossible to say why; then calmed down as inexplicably and went on, as a sailor yarns.

"At first there were only nine of them adventurous sparks; then, just a day or two before the sailing date, *he* turned up. Heard of it somehow, somewhere—I would say from some woman, if I didn't know him as I do. He would give any woman a ten-mile berth. He can't stand them. Or maybe in a flash bar. Or maybe in one of them grand clubs in Pall Mall. Anyway, the agent netted him in all right—cash down, and only about four and twenty hours for him to get ready; but he didn't

miss his ship. Not he! You might have called it a pier-head jump—for a gentleman. I saw him come along. Know the West India Docks, eh?"

Schomberg did not know the West India Docks. Ricardo looked at him pensively for a while, and then continued, as if such ignorance had to be disregarded.

"Our tug was already alongside. Two loafers were carrying his dunnage behind him. I told the dockmen at our moorings to keep all fast for a minute. The gangway was down already; but he made nothing of it. Up he jumps, one leap, swings his long legs over the rail, and there he is on board. They pass up his swell dunnage, and he puts his hand in his trousers pocket and throws all his small change on the wharf for them chaps to pick up. They were still promenading that wharf on all fours when we cast off. It was only then that he looked at me—quietly, you know; in a slow way. He wasn't so thin then as he is now; but I noticed he wasn't so young as he looked—not by a long chalk. He seemed to touch me inside somewhere. I went away pretty quick from there; I was wanted forward, anyhow. I wasn't frightened. What should I be frightened for? I only felt touched—on the very spot. But Jee-miny, if anybody had told me we should be partners before the year was out—well, I would have—"

He swore a variety of strange oaths, some common, others quaintly horrible to Schomberg's ears, and all mere innocent exclamations of wonder at the shifts and changes of human fortune. Schomberg moved slightly in his chair. But the admirer and partner of "plain Mr. Jones" seemed to have forgotten Schomberg's existence for the moment. The stream of ingenuous blasphemy—some of it in bad Spanish—had run dry, and Martin Ricardo, connoisseur in gentlemen, sat dumb with a stony gaze as if still marvelling inwardly at the amazing elections, conjunctions and associations of events which influence man's pilgrimage on this earth.

At last Schomberg spoke tentatively:

"And so the—the gentleman, up there, talked you over into leaving a good berth?"

Ricardo started.

"Talked me over! Didn't need to talk me over. He just beckoned to me, and that was enough. By that time we were in the Gulf of Mexico. One night we were lying at anchor, close to a dry sandbank—to this day I am not sure where it was—off the Colombian coast or thereabouts. We were to start digging the next morning, and all hands had turned in early, expecting a hard day with the shovels. Up he comes, and in his quiet, tired way of speaking—you can tell a gentleman by that as much as by anything else almost—up he comes behind me and says, just like that into my ear, in a manner: 'Well, and what do you think of our treasure hunt now?'

"I didn't even turn my head: 'xactly as I stood, I remained, and I spoke no louder than himself:

"'If you want to know, sir, it's nothing but just damned tomfoolery.'

"We had, of course, been having short talks together at one time or another during the passage. I dare say he had read me like a book. There ain't much to me, except that I have never been tame, even when walking the pavement and cracking jokes and standing drinks to chums—ay, and to strangers, too. I would watch them lifting their elbows at my expense, or splitting their sides at my fun—I *can* be funny when I like, you bet!"

A pause for self-complacent contemplation of his own fun and generosity checked the flow of Ricardo's speech. Schomberg was concerned to keep within bounds the enlargement of his eyes, which he seemed to feel growing bigger in his head.

"Yes, yes," he whispered hastily.

"I would watch them and think: 'You boys don't know who I am. If you did—!' With girls, too. Once I was courting a girl. I used to kiss her behind the ear and say to myself: 'If you only knew who's kissing you, my dear, you would scream and bolt!' Ha, ha! Not that I wanted to do them any harm; but I felt the power in myself. Now, here we sit, friendly like, and that's all right. You aren't in my way. But I am not friendly to you. I just don't care. Some men do say that; but I

really don't. You are no more to me one way or another than that fly there. Just so. I'd squash you or leave you alone. I don't care what I do."

If real force of character consists in overcoming our sudden weaknesses, Schomberg displayed plenty of that quality. At the mention of the fly, he reinforced the severe dignity of his attitude as one inflates a collapsing toy balloon with a great effort of breath. The easy-going, relaxed attitude of Ricardo was really appalling.

"That's so," he went on. "I am that sort of fellow. You wouldn't think it, would you? No. You have to be told. So I am telling you, and I dare say you only half believe it. But you can't say to yourself that I am drunk, stare at me as you may. I haven't had anything stronger than a glass of iced water all day. Takes a real gentleman to see through a fellow. Oh, yes—he spotted me. I told you we had a few talks at sea about one thing or another. And I used to watch him down the skylight, playing cards in the cuddy with the others. They had to pass the time away somehow. By the same token he caught me at it once, and it was then that I told him I was fond of cards —and generally lucky in gambling, too. Yes, he had sized me up. Why not? A gentleman's just like any other man—and something more."

It flashed through Schomberg's mind that these two were indeed well matched in their enormous dissimilarity, identical souls in different disguises.

"Says he to me"—Ricardo started again in a gossiping manner—"'I'm packed up. It's about time to go, Martin.'

"It was the first time he called me Martin. Says I: "'Is that it, sir?'

"'You didn't think I was after that sort of treasure, did you? I wanted to clear out from home quietly. It's a pretty expensive way of getting a passage across, but it has served my turn.'

"I let him know very soon that I was game for anything, from pitch and toss to wilful murder, in his company.

"'Wilful murder?' says he in his quiet way. 'What the deuce is that? What are you talking about? People

do get killed sometimes when they get in one's way, but that's self-defence—you understand?'

"I told him I did. And then I said I would run below for a minute, to ram a few of my things into a sailor's bag I had. I've never cared for a lot of dunnage; I believed in going about flying light when I was at sea. I came back and found him strolling up and down the deck, as if he were taking a breath of fresh air before turning in, like on any other evening.

"'Ready?'

"'Yes, sir.'

"He didn't even look at me. We had had a boat in the water astern ever since we came to anchor in the afternoon. He throws the stump of his cigar overboard.

"'Can you get the captain out on deck?' he asks.

"That was the last thing in the world I should have thought of doing. I lost my tongue for a moment.

"'I can try,' says I.

"'Well, then, I am going below. You get him up and keep him with you till I come back on deck. Mind! Don't let him go below till I return.'

"I could not help asking why he told me to rouse a sleeping man, when we wanted everybody on board to sleep sweetly till we got clear of the schooner. He laughs a little and says that I didn't see all the bearings of this business.

"'Mind,' he says, 'don't let him leave you till you see me come up again.' He puts his eyes close to mine. 'Keep him with you at all costs.'

"'And that means?' says I.

"'All costs to him—by every possible or impossible means. I don't want to be interrupted in my business down below. He would give me lots of trouble. I take you with me to save myself trouble in various circumstances; and you've got to enter on your work right away.'

"'Just so, sir,' says I; and he slips down the companion.

"With a gentleman you know at once where you are; but it was a ticklish job. The skipper was nothing to me

one way or another, any more than you are at this moment, Mr. Schomberg. You may light your cigar or blow your brains out this minute, and I don't care a hang which you do, both or neither. To bring the skipper up was easy enough. I had only to stamp on the deck a few times over his head. I stamped hard. But how to keep him up when he got there?

"'Anything the matter, Mr. Ricardo?' I heard his voice behind me.

"There he was, and I hadn't thought of anything to say to him; so I didn't turn around. The moonlight was brighter than many a day I could remember in the North Sea.

"'Why did you call me? What are you staring at out there, Mr. Ricardo?'

"He was deceived by my keeping my back to him. I wasn't staring at anything, but his mistake gave me a notion.

"'I am staring at something that looks like a canoe over there,' I said very slowly.

"The skipper got concerned at once. It wasn't any danger from the inhabitants, whoever they were.

"'Oh, hang it!' says he. 'That's very unfortunate.' He had hoped that the schooner being on the coast would not get known so very soon. 'Dashed awkward, with the business we've got in hand, to have a lot of niggers watching operations. But are you certain this is a canoe?'

"'It may be a drift-log,' I said; 'but I thought you had better have a look with your own eyes. You may make it out better than I can.'

"His eyes weren't anything as good as mine. But he says:

"'Certainly. Certainly. You did quite right.'

"And it's a fact I had seen some drift-logs at sunset. I saw what they were then and didn't trouble my head about them, forgot all about it till that very moment. Nothing strange in seeing drift-logs off a coast like that; and I'm hanged if the skipper didn't make one out in the wake of the moon. Strange what a little thing a man's life hangs on sometimes—a single word! Here you are,

sitting unsuspicious before me, and you may let out something unbeknown to you that would settle your hash. Not that I have any ill-feeling. I have no feelings. If the skipper had said, ' Oh, bosh ! ' and had turned his back on me, he would not have gone three steps toward his bed; but he stood there and stared. And now the job was to get him off the deck when he was no longer wanted there.

" ' We are just trying to make out if that object there is a canoe or a log,' says he to Mr. Jones.

" Mr. Jones had come up, lounging as carelessly as when he went below. While the skipper was jawing about boats and drifting logs, I asked by signs, from behind, if I hadn't better knock him on the head and drop him quietly overboard. The night was slipping by, and we had to go. It couldn't be put off till next night no more. No. No more. And do you know why ? "

Schomberg made a slight negative sign with his head. This direct appeal annoyed him, jarred on the induced quietude of a great talker forced into the part of a listener and sunk in it as a man sinks into slumber. Mr. Ricardo struck a note of scorn.

" Don't know why ? Can't you guess ? No ? Because the boss had got hold of the skipper's cash-box by then. See ? "

VII

" A COMMON thief ! "

Schomberg bit his tongue just too late, and woke up completely as he saw Ricardo retract his lips in a cat-like grin; but the companion of " plain Mr. Jones " didn't alter his comfortable, gossiping attitude.

" Garn ! What if he did want to see his money back, like any tame shopkeeper, hash-seller, gin-slinger, or ink-spewer does ? Fancy a mud-turtle like you trying to pass an opinion on a gentleman ? A gentleman isn't to be sized up so easily. Even I ain't up to it sometimes. For instance, that night, all he did was to waggle his

finger at me. The skipper stops his silly chatter, surprised.

"'Eh? What's the matter?' asks he.

"The matter! It was his reprieve—that's what was the matter.

"'Oh, nothing, nothing,' says my gentleman. 'You are perfectly right. A log—nothing but a log.'

"Ha, ha! Reprieve, I call it, because if the skipper had gone on with his silly argument much longer he would have had to be knocked out of the way. I could hardly hold myself in on account of the precious minutes. However, his guardian angel put it into his head to shut up and go back to his bed. I was ramping mad about the lost time.

"'Why didn't you let me give him one on his silly cocoanut, sir?' I asks.

"'No ferocity, no ferocity,' he says, raising his finger at me as calm as you please.

"You can't tell how a gentleman takes that sort of thing. They don't lose their temper. It's bad form. You'll never see him lose his temper—not for anybody to see, anyhow. Ferocity ain't good form, either—that much I've learned by this time, and more, too. I've had that schooling that you couldn't tell by my face if I meant to rip you up the next minute—as of course I could do in less than a jiffy. I have a knife up the leg of my trousers."

"You haven't!" exclaimed Schomberg incredulously.

Mr. Ricardo was as quick as lightning in changing his lounging, idle attitude for a stooping position, and exhibiting the weapon with one jerk at the left leg of his trousers. Schomberg had just a view of it, strapped to a very hairy limb, when Mr. Ricardo, jumping up, stamped his foot to get the trouser-leg down, and resumed his careless pose with one elbow on the table.

"It's a more handy way to carry a tool than you would think," he went on, gazing abstractedly into Schomberg's wide-open eyes "Suppose some little difference comes up during a game. Well, you stoop to pick up a dropped card, and when you come up—there you are ready to strike, or with the thing up your sleeve ready to throw. Or you just dodge under the table when there's some

shooting coming. You wouldn't believe the damage a fellow with a knife under the table can do to ill-conditioned skunks that want to raise trouble, before they begin to understand what the screaming's about, and make a bolt —those that can, that is."

The roses of Schomberg's cheek at the root of his chestnut beard faded perceptibly. Ricardo chuckled faintly.

"But no ferocity—no ferocity! A gentleman knows. What's the good of getting yourself into a state? And no shirking necessity, either. No gentleman ever shirks. What I learn I don't forget. Why! We gambled on the plains, with a damn lot of cattlemen in ranches; played fair, mind—and then had to fight for our winnings afterwards as often as not. We've gambled on the hills and in the valleys and on the seashore, and out of sight of land—mostly fair. Generally it's good enough. We began in Nicaragua first, after we left that schooner and her fool errand. There were one hundred and twenty-seven sovereigns and some Mexican dollars in that skipper's cash-box. Hardly enough to knock a man on the head for from behind, I must confess; but that the skipper had a narrow escape, the governor himself could not deny afterwards.

"'Do you want me to understand, sir, that you mind there being one life more or less on this earth?' I asked him, a few hours after we got away.

"'Certainly not,' says he.

"'Well, then, why did you stop me?'

"'There's a proper way of doing things. You'll have to learn to be correct. There's also unnecessary exertion. That must be avoided, too—if only for the look of the thing.' A gentleman's way of putting things to you,—and no mistake!

"At sunrise we got into a creek, to lie hidden in case the treasure-hunt party had a mind to take a spell hunting for us. And dash me if they didn't! We saw the schooner away out, running to leeward, with ten pairs of binoculars sweeping the sea, no doubt, on all sides. I advised the governor to give her time to beat back again before we

made a start. So we stayed up that creek something like ten days, as snug as can be. On the seventh day we had to kill a man, though—the brother of this Pedro here. They were alligator-hunters, right enough. We got our lodgings in their hut. Neither the boss nor I could *habla Español*—speak Spanish, you know—much then. Dry bank, nice shade, jolly hammocks, fresh fish, good game, everything lovely. The governor chucked them a few dollars to begin with; but it was like boarding with a pair of savage apes, anyhow. By and by we noticed them talking a lot together. They had twigged the cash-box, and the leather portmanteaus, and my bag—a jolly lot of plunder to look at. They must have been saying to each other:

"'No one's ever likely to come looking for these two fellows, who seem to have fallen from the moon. Let's cut their throats.'

"Why, of course! Clear as daylight. I didn't need to spy one of them sharpening a devilish long knife behind some bushes, while glancing right and left with his wild eyes, to know what was in the wind. Pedro was standing by, trying the edge of another long knife. They thought we were away on our lookout at the mouth of the river, as was usual with us during the day. Not that we expected to see much of the schooner, but it was just as well to make certain, if possible; and then it was cooler out of the woods, in the breeze. Well, the governor was there right enough, lying comfortable on a rug, where he could watch the offing, but I had gone back to the hut to get a chew of tobacco out of my bag. I had not broken myself of the habit then, and I couldn't be happy unless I had a lump as big as a baby's fist in my cheek."

At the cannibalistic comparison, Schomberg muttered a faint sickly "don't." Ricardo hitched himself up in his seat and glanced down his outstretched legs complacently.

"I am tolerably light on my feet, as a general thing," he went on. "Dash me if I don't think I could drop a pinch of salt on a sparrow's tail, if I tried. Anyhow, they didn't hear me. I watched them two brown, hairy

brutes not ten yards off. All they had on was white linen drawers rolled up on their thighs. Not a word they said to each other. Antonio was down on his thick hams, busy rubbing the knife on a flat stone; Pedro was leaning against a small tree and passing his thumb along the edge of his blade. I got away quieter than a mouse, you bet.

"I didn't say anything to the boss then. He was leaning on his elbow on his rug, and didn't seem to want to be spoken to. He's like that—sometimes that familiar you might think he would eat out of your hand, and at others he would snub you sharper than a devil—but always quiet. Perfect gentleman, I tell you. I didn't bother him then; but I wasn't likely to forget them two fellows, so business-like with their knives. At that time we had only one revolver between us two—the governor's six-shooter, but loaded only in five chambers; and we had no more cartridges. He had left the box behind in a drawer in his cabin. Awkward! I had nothing but an old clasp-knife—no good at all for anything serious.

"In the evening we four sat round a bit of fire outside the sleeping-shed, eating broiled fish off plantain leaves, with roast yams for bread—the usual thing. The governor and I were on one side, and these two beauties cross-legged on the other, grunting a word or two to each other now and then, hardly human speech at all, and their eyes down, fast on the ground. For the last three days we couldn't get them to look us in the face. Presently I began to talk to the boss quietly, just as I am talking to you now, careless like, and I told him all I had observed. He goes on picking up pieces of fish and putting them into his mouth as calm as anything. It's a pleasure to have anything to do with a gentleman. Never looked across at them once.

"'And now,' says I, yawning on purpose, 'we've got to stand watch at night, turn about, and keep our eyes skinned all day, too, and mind we don't get jumped upon suddenly.'

"'It's perfectly intolerable,' says the governor. 'And you with no weapon of any sort!'

"'I mean to stick pretty close to you, sir, from this on, if you don't mind,' says I.

"He just nods the least bit, wipes his fingers on the plantain leaf, puts his hand behind his back, as if to help himself to rise from the ground, snatches his revolver from under his jacket, and plugs a bullet plumb centre into Mr. Antonio's chest. See what it is to have to do with a gentleman. No confounded fuss, and things done out of hand. But he might have tipped me a wink or something. I nearly jumped out of my skin. Scared ain't in it! I didn't even know who had fired. Everything had been so still just before that the bang of the shot seemed the loudest noise I had ever heard. The honourable Antonio pitches forward—they always do, towards the shot; you must have noticed that yourself—yes, he pitches forward on to the embers, and all that lot of hair on his face and head flashes up like a pinch of gunpowder. Greasy, I expect; always scraping the fat off them alligators' hides—"

"Look here," exclaimed Schomberg violently, as if trying to burst some invisible bonds, "do you mean to say that all this happened?"

"No," said Ricardo coolly. "I am making it all up as I go along, just to help you through the hottest part of the afternoon. So down he pitches, his nose on the red embers, and up jumps our handsome Pedro and I at the same time, like two Jacks-in-the-box. He starts to bolt away, with his head over his shoulder, and I, hardly knowing what I was doing, spring on his back. I had the sense to get my hands round his neck at once and it's about all I could do to lock my fingers tight under his jaw. You saw the beauty's neck, didn't you? Hard as iron, too. Down we both went. Seeing this, the governor puts his revolver in his pocket.

"'Tie his legs together, sir,' I yell. 'I'm trying to strangle him.'

"There was a lot of their fibre-lines lying about. I gave him a last squeeze and then got up.

"'I might have shot you,' says the governor, quite concerned.

"'But you are glad to have saved a cartridge, sir,' I tell him.

"My jump did save it. It wouldn't have done to let him get away in the dark like that, and have the beauty dodging around in the bushes, perhaps, with the rusty flint-lock gun they had. The governor owned up that the jump was the correct thing.

"'But he isn't dead,' says he, bending over him.

"Might as well hope to strangle an ox. We made haste to tie his elbows back, and then, before he came to himself, we dragged him to a small tree, sat him up, and bound him to it, not by the waist but by the neck—some twenty turns of small line round his throat and the trunk, finished off with a reef-knot under his ear. Next thing we did was to attend to the honourable Antonio, who was making a great smell frizzling his face on the red coals. We pushed and rolled him into the creek, and left the rest to the alligators.

"I was tired. That little scrap took it out of me something awful. The governor hadn't turned a hair. That's where a gentleman has the pull of you. He don't get excited. No gentleman does—or hardly ever. I fell asleep all of a sudden and left him smoking by the fire I had made up, his railway rug round his legs, as calm as if he were sitting in a first-class carriage. We hardly spoke ten words to each other after it was over, and from that day to this we have never talked of the business. I wouldn't have known he remembered it, if he hadn't alluded to it when talking with you the other day—you know, with regard to Pedro.

"It surprised you, didn't it? That's why I am giving you this yarn of how he came to be with us, like a sort of dog—dashed sight more useful, though. You know how he can trot around with trays? Well, he could bring down an ox with his fist, at a word from the boss, just as cleverly. And fond of the governor! Oh, my word! More than any dog is of any man."

Schomberg squared his chest.

"Oh, and that's one of the things I wanted to mention to Mr. Jones," he said. "It's unpleasant to have that

fellow round the house so early. He sits on the stairs at the back for hours before he is needed here, and frightens people so that the service suffers. The Chinamen—"

Ricardo nodded and raised his hand.

"When I first saw him he was fit to frighten a grizzly bear, let alone a Chinaman. He's become civilised now to what he once was. Well, that morning, first thing on opening my eyes, I saw him sitting there, tied up by the neck to the tree. He was blinking. We spent the day watching the sea, and we actually made out the schooner working to windward, which showed that she had given us up. Good! When the sun rose again, I took a squint at our Pedro. He wasn't blinking. He was rolling his eyes, all white one minute and black the next, and his tongue was hanging out a yard. Being tied up short by the neck like this would daunt the arch devil himself—in time—in time, mind! I don't know but that even a real gentleman would find it difficult to keep a stiff lip to the end. Presently we went to work getting our boat ready. I was busying myself setting up the mast, when the governor passes the remark:

"'I think he wants to say something.'

"I had heard a sort of croaking going on for some time, only I wouldn't take any notice; but then I got out of the boat and went up to him, with some water. His eyes were red—red and black and half out of his head. He drank all the water I gave him, but he hadn't much to say for himself. I walked back to the governor.

"'He asks for a bullet in his head before we go,' I said. I wasn't at all pleased.

"'Oh, that's out of the question altogether,' says the governor.

"He was right there. Only four shots left, and ninety miles of wild coast to put behind us before coming to the first place where you could expect to buy revolver cartridges.

"'Anyhow,' I tells him, 'he wants to be killed some way or other, as a favour.'

"And then I go on setting the boat's mast. I didn't care much for the notion of butchering a man bound hand

and foot and fastened by the neck besides. I had a knife then—the honourable Antonio's knife; and that knife is this knife."

Ricardo gave his leg a resounding slap.

"First spoil in my new life," he went on with harsh joviality. "The dodge of carrying it down there I learned later. I carried it stuck in my belt that day. No, I hadn't much stomach for the job; but when you work with a gentleman of the real right sort you may depend on your feelings being seen through your skin. Says the governor suddenly:

"'It may even be looked upon as his right'—you hear a gentleman speaking there?—'but what do you think of taking him with us in the boat?'

"And the governor starts arguing that the beggar would be useful in working our way along the coast. We could get rid of him before coming to the first place that was a little civilised. I didn't want much talking over. Out I scrambled from the boat.

"'Ay, but will he be manageable, sir?'

"'Oh, yes. He's daunted. Go on, cut him loose—I take the responsibility.'

"'Right you are, sir.'

"He sees me come along smartly with his brother's knife in my hand—I wasn't thinking how it looked from his side of the fence, you know—and jiminy, it nearly killed him! He stared like a crazed bullock and began to sweat and twitch all over, something amazing. I was so surprised that I stopped to look at him. The drops were pouring over his eyebrows, down his beard, off his nose—and he gurgled. Then it struck me that he couldn't see what was in my mind. By favour or by right he didn't like to die when it came to it; not in that way, anyhow. When I stepped round to get at the lashing, he let out a sort of soft bellow. Thought I was going to stick him from behind, I guess. I cut all the turns with one slash, and he went over on his side, flop, and started kicking with his tied legs. Laugh! I don't know what there was so funny about it, but I fairly shouted. What between my laughing and his wriggling, I had a job in cutting him

free. As soon as he could feel his limbs he makes for the bank, where the governor was standing, crawls up to him on his hands and knees, and embraces his legs. Gratitude, eh? You could see that being allowed to live suited that chap down to the ground. The governor gets his legs away from him gently and just mutters to me:

"'Let's be off. Get him into the boat.'

"It was not difficult," continued Ricardo, after eyeing Schomberg fixedly for a moment. "He was ready enough to get into the boat, and—here he is. He would let himself be chopped into small pieces—with a smile, mind; with a smile!—for the governor. I don't know about him doing that much for me; but pretty near, pretty near. I did the tying up and the untying, but he could see who was the boss. And then he knows a gentleman. A dog knows a gentleman—any dog. It's only some foreigners that don't know; and nothing can teach them, either."

"And you mean to say," asked Schomberg, disregarding what might have been annoying for himself in the emphasis of the final remark, "you mean to say that you left steady employment at good wages for a life like this?"

"There!" began Ricardo quietly. "That's just what a man like you would say. You are that tame! I follow a gentleman. That ain't the same thing as to serve an employer. They give you wages as they'd fling a bone to a dog, and they expect you to be grateful. It's worse than slavery. You don't expect a slave that's bought for money to be grateful. And if you sell your work—what is it but selling your own self? You've got so many days to live and you sell them one after another. Hey? Who can pay me enough for my life? Ay! But they throw at you your week's money and expect you to say, 'thank you' before you pick it up."

He mumbled some curses, directed at employers generally, as it seemed, then blazed out:

"Work be damned! I ain't a dog walking on its hind legs for a bone; I am a man who's following a gentleman. There's a difference which you will never understand, Mr. Tame Schomberg."

He yawned slightly. Schomberg, preserving a military

stiffness reinforced by a slight frown, had allowed his thoughts to stray away. They were busy detailing the image of a young girl—absent—gone—stolen from him. He became enraged. There was that rascal looking at him insolently. If the girl had not been shamefully decoyed away from him, he would not have allowed any one to look at him insolently. He would have made nothing of hitting that rogue between the eyes. Afterwards he would have kicked the other without hesitation. He saw himself doing it; and in sympathy with this glorious vision Schomberg's right foot and right arm moved convulsively.

At this moment he came out of his sudden reverie to note with alarm the wide-awake curiosity of Mr. Ricardo's stare.

"And so you go like this about the world, gambling," he remarked inanely, to cover his confusion. But Ricardo's stare did not change its character, and he continued vaguely:

"Here and there and everywhere." He pulled himself together, squared his shoulders. "Isn't it very precarious?" he said firmly.

The word precarious seemed to be effective, because Ricardo's eyes lost their dangerously interested expression.

"No, not so bad," Ricardo said, with indifference. "It's my opinion that men will gamble as long as they have anything to put on a card. Gamble? That's nature. What's life itself? You never know what may turn up. The worst of it is that you never can tell exactly what sort of cards you are holding yourself. What's trumps?—that is the question. See? Any man will gamble if only he's given a chance, for anything or everything. You too—"

"I haven't touched a card now for twenty years," said Schomberg in an austere tone.

"Well, if you got your living that way you would be no worse than you are now, selling drinks to people—beastly beer and spirits, rotten stuff fit to make an old he-goat yell if you poured it down its throat. Pooh! I can't stand the confounded liquor. Never could. A whiff

of neat brandy in a glass makes me feel sick. Always did. If everybody was like me, liquor would be going a-begging. You think it's funny in a man, don't you ? "

Schomberg made a vague gesture of toleration. Ricardo hitched up in his chair and settled his elbow afresh on the table.

" French siros I must say I do like. Saigon's the place for them. I see you have siros in the bar. Hang me if I ain't getting dry, conversing like this with you. Come, Mr. Schomberg, be hospitable, as the governor says."

Schomberg rose and walked with dignity to the counter. His footsteps echoed loudly on the floor of polished boards. He took down a bottle labelled *Sirop de Groseille*. The little sounds he made, the clink of glass, the gurgling of the liquid, the pop of the soda-water cork had a preternatural sharpness. He came back carrying a pink and glistening tumbler. Mr. Ricardo had followed his movements with oblique, coyly expectant yellow eyes, like a cat watching the preparation of a saucer of milk ; and the satisfied sound after he had drunk might have been a slightly modified form of purring, very soft and deep in his throat. It affected Schomberg unpleasantly as another example of something inhuman in those men wherein lay the difficulty of dealing with them. A spectre, a cat, an ape—there was a pretty association for a mere man to remonstrate with, he reflected with an inward shudder ; for Schomberg had been overpowered, as it were, by his imagination, and his reason could not react against that fanciful view of his guests. And it was not only their appearance. The morals of Mr. Ricardo seemed to him to be pretty much the morals of a cat. Too much. What sort of argument could a mere man offer to a . . . or to a spectre, either ! What the morals of a spectre could be, Schomberg had no idea. Something dreadful, no doubt. Compassion certainly had no place in them. As to the ape—well, everybody knew what an ape was. It had no morals. Nothing could be more hopeless.

Outwardly, however, having picked up the cigar which he had laid aside to get the drink, with his thick fingers, one of them ornamented by a gold ring, Schomberg smoked

with moody composure. Facing him, Ricardo blinked slowly for a time, then closed his eyes altogether, with the placidity of the domestic cat dozing on the hearth-rug. In another moment, he opened them very wide and seemed surprised to see Schomberg there.

"You're having a very slack time to-day, aren't you?" he observed. "But then this whole town is confoundedly slack, anyhow; and I've never faced such a slack party at a table before. Come eleven o'clock, they begin to talk of breaking up. What's the matter with them? Want to go to bed so early, or what?"

"I reckon you don't lose a fortune by their wanting to go to bed," said Schomberg, with sombre sarcasm.

"No," admitted Ricardo, with a grin that stretched his thin mouth from ear to ear, giving a sudden glimpse of his white teeth. "Only, you see, when I once start, I would play for nuts, for parched peas, for any rubbish. I would play them for their souls. But these Dutchmen aren't any good. They never seem to get warmed up properly, win or lose. I've tried them both ways, too. Hang them for a beggarly, bloodless lot of animated cucumbers!"

"And if anything out of the way was to happen, they would be just as cool in locking you and your gentleman up," Schomberg snarled unpleasantly.

"Indeed!" said Ricardo slowly, taking Schomberg's measure with his eyes. "And what about you?"

"You talk mighty big," burst out the hotel-keeper. "You talk of ranging all over the world, and doing great things, and taking fortune by the scruff of the neck, but here you stick at this miserable business!"

"It isn't much of a lay—that's a fact," admitted Ricardo unexpectedly.

Schomberg was red in the face with audacity.

"I call it paltry," he spluttered.

"That's how it looks. Can't call it anything else." Ricardo seemed to be in an accommodating mood. "I should be ashamed of it myself, only you see the governor is subject to fits—"

"Fits!" Schomberg cried out, but in a low tone. "You

don't say so!" He exulted inwardly, as if this disclosure had in some way diminished the difficulty of the situation. "Fits! That's a serious thing, isn't it? You ought to take him to the civil hospital—a lovely place."

Ricardo nodded slightly, with a faint grin.

"Serious enough. Regular fits of laziness, I call them. Now and then he lays down on me like this, and there's no moving him. If you think I like it, you're a long way out. Generally speaking, I can talk him over. I know how to deal with a gentleman. I am no daily-bred slave. But when he has said, 'Martin, I am bored,' then look out! There's nothing to do but to shut up, confound it!"

Schomberg, very much cast down, had listened, open-mouthed.

"What's the cause of it?" he asked. "Why is he like this? I don't understand."

"I think I do," said Ricardo; "A gentleman, you know, is not such a simple person as you or I; and not so easy to manage, either. If only I had something to lever him out with!"

"What do you mean, to lever him out with?" muttered Schomberg hopelessly.

Ricardo was impatient with this denseness.

"Don't you understand English? Look here! I couldn't make this billiard table move an inch if I talked to it from now till the end of days—could I? Well, the governor is like that, too, when the fits are on him. He's bored. Nothing's worth while, nothing's good enough, that's mere sense. But if I saw a capstan bar lying about here, I would soon manage to shift that billiard table of yours a good many inches. And that's all there is to it."

He rose noiselessly, stretched himself, supple and stealthy, with curious sideways movements of his head and unexpected elongations of his thick body, glanced out of the corners of his eyes in the direction of the door, and finally leaned back against the table, folding his arms on his breast comfortably, in a completely human attitude.

"That's another thing you can tell a gentleman by—his freakishness. A gentleman ain't accountable to nobody, any more than a tramp on the roads. He ain't

got to keep time. The governor got like this once in a one-horse Mexican pueblo on the uplands, away from everywhere. He lay all day long in a dark room—"

"Drunk?" This word escaped Schomberg by inadvertence, at which he became frightened. But the devoted secretary seemed to find it natural.

"No, that never comes on together with this kind of fit. He just lay there full length on a mat, while a ragged, bare-legged boy that he had picked up in the street sat in the *patio*, between two oleanders near the open door of his room, strumming on a guitar and singing *tristes* to him from morning to night. You know *tristes*—twang, twang, twang, aouh, hoo! Chroo, yah!"

Schomberg uplifted his hands in distress. This tribute seemed to flatter Ricardo. His mouth twitched grimly.

"Like that—enough to give colic to an ostrich, eh? Awful. Well, there was a cook there who loved me—an old, fat negro woman with spectacles. I used to hide in the kitchen and turn her to, to make me *dulces*—sweet things, you know, mostly eggs and sugar—to pass the time away. I am like a kid for sweet things. And, by the way, why don't you ever have a pudding at your tablydott, Mr. Schomberg? Nothing but fruit, morning, noon, and night. Sickening! What do you think a fellow is—a wasp?"

Schomberg disregarded the injured tone.

"And how long did that fit, as you call it, last?" he asked anxiously.

"Weeks, months, years, centuries, it seemed to me," returned Mr. Ricardo with feeling. "Of an evening the governor would stroll out into the *sala* and fritter his life away playing cards with the *juez* of the place—a little Dago with a pair of black whiskers—ekarty, you know, a quick French game, for small change. And the *comandante*, a one-eyed, half-Indian, flat-nosed ruffian and I, we had to stand around and bet on their hands. It was awful!"

"Awful," echoed Schomberg in a Teutonic throaty tone of despair. "Look here, I need your rooms."

"To be sure. I have been thinking that for some time past," said Ricardo indifferently.

"I was mad when I listened to you. This must end!"

"I think you are mad yet," said Ricardo, not even unfolding his arms or shifting his attitude an inch. He lowered his voice to add: "And if I thought you had been to the police, I would tell Pedro to catch you round the waist and break your fat neck by jerking your head backward—*snap!* I saw him do it to a big buck nigger who was flourishing a razor in front of the governor. It can be done. You hear a low crack, that's all—and the man drops down like a limp rag."

Not even Ricardo's head, slightly inclined on the left shoulder, had moved; but when he ceased the greenish irises which had been staring out of doors glided into the corners of his eyes nearest to Schomberg and stayed there with a coyly voluptuous expression.

VIII

SCHOMBERG felt desperation, that lamentable substitute for courage, ooze out of him. It was not so much the threat of death as the weirdly circumstantial manner of its declaration which affected him. A mere "I'll murder you," however ferocious in tone and earnest in purpose, he could have faced; but before this novel mode of speech and procedure, his imagination being very sensitive to the unusual, he collapsed as if indeed his moral neck had been broken—snap!

"Go to the police? Of course not. Never dreamed of it. Too late now. I've let myself be mixed up in this. You got my consent while I wasn't myself. I explained it to you at the time."

Ricardo's eyes glided gently off Schomberg to stare far away.

"Ay! Some trouble with a girl. But that's nothing to us."

"Naturally. What I say is, what's the good of all that savage talk to me?" A bright argument occurred to him. "It's out of proportion; for even if I were fool

enough to go to the police now, there's nothing serious to complain about. It would only mean deportation for you. They would put you on board the first west-bound steamer to Singapore." He had become animated. "Out of this to the devil," he added between his teeth for his own private satisfaction.

Ricardo made no comment, and gave no sign of having heard a single word. This discouraged Schomberg, who had looked up hopefully.

"Why do you want to stick here?" he cried. "It can't pay you people to fool around like this. Didn't you worry just now about moving your governor? Well, the police would move him for you; and from Singapore you can go on to the east coast of Africa."

"I'll be hanged if the fellow isn't up to that silly trick!" was Ricardo's comment, spoken in an ominous tone which recalled Schomberg to the realities of his position.

"No! No!" he protested. "It's a manner of speaking. Of course I wouldn't."

"I think that trouble about the girl has really muddled your brains, Mr. Schomberg. Believe me, you had better part friends with us; for, deportation or no deportation, you'll be seeing one of us turning up before long to pay you off for any nasty dodge you may be hatching in that fat head of yours."

"*Gott im Himmel!*" groaned Schomberg. "Will nothing move him out? Will he stop here immer—I mean always? Suppose I were to make it worth your while, couldn't you—"

"No," Ricardo interrupted. "I couldn't, unless I had something to lever him out with. I've told you that before."

"An inducement?" muttered Schomberg.

"Ay. The east coast of Africa isn't good enough. He told me the other day that it will have to wait till he is ready for it; and he may not be ready for a long time, because the east coast can't run away, and no one is likely to run off with it."

These remarks, whether considered as truisms or as depicting Mr. Jones's mental state, were distinctly dis-

couraging to the long-suffering Schomberg; but there is truth in the well-known saying that places the darkest hour before the dawn. The sound of words, apart from the context, has its power; and these two words, "run off," had a special affinity to the hotel-keeper's haunting idea. It was always present in his brain, and now it came forward evoked by a purely fortuitous expression. No, nobody could run off with a continent; but Heyst had run off with the girl!

Ricardo could have had no conception of the cause of Schomberg's changed expression. Yet it was noticeable enough to interest him so much that he stopped the careless swinging of his leg and said, looking at the hotel-keeper:

"There's not much use arguing against that sort of talk—is there?"

Schomberg was not listening.

"I could put you on another track," he said slowly, and stopped, as if suddenly choked by an unholy emotion of intense eagerness combined with fear of failure. Ricardo waited, attentive, yet not without a certain contempt.

"On the track of a man!" Schomberg uttered convulsively, and paused again, consulting his rage and his conscience.

"The man in the moon, eh?" suggested Ricardo, in a jeering murmur.

Schomberg shook his head.

"It would be nearly as safe to rook him as if he were the man in the moon. You go and try. It isn't so very far."

He reflected. These men were thieves and murderers as well as gamblers. Their fitness for purposes of vengeance was appallingly complete. But he preferred not to think of it in detail. He put it to himself summarily that he would be paying Heyst out and would, at the same time, relieve himself of these men's oppression. He had only to let loose his natural gift for talking scandalously about his fellow creatures. And in this case his great practice in it was assisted by hate, which, like love, has an eloquence of its own. With the utmost ease he portrayed for Ricardo, now seriously attentive, a Heyst

fattened by years of private and public rapines, the murderer of Morrison, the swindler of many shareholders, a wonderful mixture of craft and impudence, of deep purposes and simple wiles, of mystery and futility. In this exercise of his natural function Schomberg revived, the colour coming back to his face, loquacious, florid, eager, his manliness set off by the military bearing.

"That's the exact story. He was seen hanging about this part of the world for years, spying into everybody's business; but I am the only one who has seen through him from the first—contemptible, double-faced, stick-at-nothing, dangerous fellow."

"Dangerous, is he?"

Schomberg came to himself at the sound of Ricardo's voice.

"Well, you know what I mean," he said uneasily. "A lying, circumventing, soft-spoken, polite, stuck up rascal. Nothing open about him."

Mr. Ricardo had slipped off the table, and was prowling about the room in an oblique, noiseless manner. He flashed a grin at Schomberg in passing, and a snarling: "Ah! H'm!"

"Well, what more dangerous do you want?" argued Schomberg. "He's in no way a fighting man, I believe," he added negligently.

"And you say he has been living alone there?"

"Like the man in the moon," answered Schomberg readily. "There's no one that cares a rap what becomes of him. He has been lying low, you understand, after bagging all that plunder."

"Plunder, eh? Why didn't he go home with it?" inquired Ricardo.

The henchman of "plain Mr. Jones" was beginning to think that this was something worth looking into. And he was pursuing truth in the manner of men of sounder morality and purer intentions than his own; that is he pursued it in the light of his own experience and prejudices. For facts, whatever their origin (and God only knows where they come from), can be only tested by our own particular suspicions. Ricardo was suspicious all

round. Schomberg, such is the tonic power of recovered self-esteem, Schomberg retorted fearlessly:

"Go home? Why don't *you* go home? To hear your talk, you must have made a pretty considerable pile going round winning people's money. You ought to be ready by this time."

Ricardo stopped to look at Schomberg with surprise.

"You think yourself very clever, don't you?" he said.

Schomberg just then was so conscious of being clever that the snarling irony left him unmoved. There was positively a smile in his noble Teutonic beard, the first smile for weeks. He was in a felicitous vein.

"How do you know that he wasn't thinking of going home? As a matter of fact, he was on his way home."

"And how do I know that you are not amusing yourself by spinning out a blamed fairy tale?" interrupted Ricardo roughly. "I wonder at myself listening to the silly rot!"

Schomberg received this turn of temper unmoved. He did not require to be very subtly observant to notice that he had managed to arouse some sort of feeling, perhaps of greed, in Ricardo's breast.

"You won't believe me? Well! You can ask anybody that comes here if that—that Swede hadn't got as far as this house on his way home. Why should he turn up here if not for that? You ask anybody."

"Ask, indeed!" returned the other. "Catch me asking at large about a man I mean to drop on! Such jobs must be done on the quiet—or not at all."

The peculiar intonation of the last phrase touched the nape of Schomberg's neck with a chill. He cleared his throat slightly and looked away as though he had heard something indelicate. Then, with a jump as it were:

"Of course he didn't tell me. Is it likely? But haven't I got eyes? Haven't I got my common sense to tell me? I can see through people. By the same token, he called on the Tesmans. Why did he call on the Tesmans two days running, eh? You don't know? You can't tell?"

He waited complacently till Ricardo had finished swearing quite openly at him for a confounded chatterer, and then went on:

"A fellow doesn't go to a counting-house in business hours for a chat about the weather, two days running. Then why? To close his account with them one day, and to get his money out the next! Clear, what?"

Ricardo, with his trick of looking one way and moving another, approached Schomberg slowly.

"To get his money?" he purred.

"*Gewiss*," snapped Schomberg with impatient superiority. "What else? That is, only the money he had with the Tesmans. What he has buried or put away on the island, devil only knows. When you think of the lot of hard cash that passed through that man's hands, for wages and stores and all that—and he's just a cunning thief, I tell you." Ricardo's hard stare discomposed the hotel-keeper, and he added in an embarrassed tone: "I mean a common, sneaking thief—no account at all. And he calls himself a Swedish baron, too! Tfui!"

"He's a baron, is he? That foreign nobility ain't much," commented Mr. Ricardo seriously. "And then what? He hung about here."

"Yes, he hung about," said Schomberg, making a wry mouth. "He—hung about. That's it. Hung—"

His voice died out. Curiosity was depicted in Ricardo's countenance.

"Just like that; for nothing? And then turned about and went back to that island again?"

"And went back to that island again," Schomberg echoed lifelessly, fixing his gaze on the floor.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Ricardo with genuine surprise. "What is it?"

Schomberg, without looking up, made an impatient gesture. His face was crimson, and he kept it lowered. Ricardo went back to the point.

"Well, but how do you account for it? What was his reason? What did he go back to the island for?"

"Honeymoon!" spat out Schomberg viciously.

Perfectly still, his eyes downcast, he suddenly, with

no preliminary stir, hit the table with his fist a blow which caused the utterly unprepared Ricardo to leap aside. And only then did Schomberg look up with a dull, resentful expression.

Ricardo stared hard for a moment, spun on his heel, walked to the end of the room, came back smartly and muttered a profound "Ay! Ay!" above Schomberg's rigid head. That the hotel-keeper was capable of a great moral effort was proved by a gradual return of his severe, Lieutenant-of-the-Reserve manner.

"Ay, ay!" repeated Ricardo more deliberately than before, and as if after a further survey of the circumstances. "I wish I hadn't asked you, or that you had told me a lie. It don't suit me to know that there's a woman mixed up in this affair. What's she like? It's the girl you—"

"Leave off!" muttered Schomberg, utterly pitiful behind his stiff military front.

"Ay, ay!" Ricardo ejaculated for the third time, more and more enlightened and perplexed. "Can't bear to talk about it—so bad as that? And yet I would bet she isn't a miracle to look at."

Schomberg made a gesture as if he didn't know, as if he didn't care. Then he squared his shoulders and frowned at vacancy.

"Swedish baron—h'm!" Ricardo continued meditatively. "I believe the governor would think that business worth looking up, quite, if I put it to him properly. The governor likes a duel, if you will call it so; but I don't know a man that can stand up to him on the square. Have you ever seen a cat play with a mouse? It's a pretty sight."

Ricardo, with his voluptuously gleaming eyes and the coy expression, looked so much like a cat that Schomberg would have felt all the alarm of a mouse if other feelings had not had complete possession of his breast.

"There are no lies between you and me," he said, more steadily than he thought he could speak.

"What's the good now? He funks women. In that Mexican pueblo where we lay grounded on our beef-bones, so to speak, I used to go to dances of an evening. The

girls there would ask me if the English *caballero* in the *posada* was a monk in disguise, or if he had taken a vow to the *sancissima madre* not to speak to a woman, or whether—You can imagine what fairly free-spoken girls will ask when they come to the point of not caring what they say; and it used to vex me. Yes, the governor funks facing women."

"One woman?" interjected Schomberg in guttural tones.

"One may be more awkward to deal with than two, or two hundred, for that matter. In a place that's full of women you needn't look at them unless you like; but if you go into a room where there is only one woman, young or old, pretty or ugly, you have got to face her. And, unless you are after her, then—the governor is right enough—she's in the way."

"Why notice them?" muttered Schomberg. "What can they do?"

"Make a noise, if nothing else," opined Mr. Ricardo curtly, with the distaste of a man whose path is a path of silence; for, indeed, nothing is more odious than a noise when one is engaged in a weighty and absorbing card game. "Noise, noise, my friend," he went on forcibly; "confounded screeching about something or other, and I like it no more than the governor does. But with the governor there's something else besides. He can't stand them at all."

He paused to reflect on this psychological phenomenon, and as no philosopher was at hand to tell him that there is no strong sentiment without some terror, as there is no real religion without a little fetichism, he emitted his own conclusion, which surely could not go to the root of the matter.

"I'm hanged if I don't think they are to him what liquor is to me. Brandy—pah!"

He made a disgusted face, and produced a genuine shudder. Schomberg listened to him in wonder. It looked as if the very scoundrelism of that—that Swede would protect him; the spoil of his iniquity standing between the thief and the retribution.

"That's so, old buck." Ricardo broke the silence after contemplating Schomberg's mute dejection with a sort of sympathy. "I don't think this trick will work."

"But that's silly," whispered the man deprived of the vengeance which he had seemed already to hold in his hand, by a mysterious and exasperating idiosyncrasy.

"Don't you set yourself to judge a gentleman." Ricardo without anger administered a moody rebuke. "Even I can't understand the governor thoroughly. And I am an Englishman and his follower. No; I don't think I care to put it before him, sick as I am of staying here."

Ricardo could not be more sick of staying than Schomberg was of seeing him stay. Schomberg believed so firmly in the reality of Heyst as created by his own power of false inferences, of his hate, of his love of scandal, that he could not contain a stifled cry of conviction as sincere as most of our convictions, the disguised servants of our passions, can appear at a supreme moment.

"It would have been like going to pick up a nugget of a thousand pounds, or two or three times as much, for all I know. No trouble, no—"

"The petticoat's the trouble," Ricardo struck in.

He had resumed his noiseless, feline, oblique prowling, in which an observer would have detected a new character of excitement, such as a wild animal of the cat species, anxious to make a spring, might betray. Schomberg saw nothing. It would probably have cheered his drooping spirits; but in a general way he preferred not to look at Ricardo. Ricardo, however, with one of his slanting, gliding, restless glances, observed the bitter smile on Schomberg's bearded lips—the unmistakable smile of ruined hopes.

"You are a pretty unforgiving sort of chap," he said, stopping for a moment with an air of interest. "Hang me if I ever saw anybody look so disappointed! I bet you would send black plague to that island if you only knew how—eh, what? Plague too good for them? Ha, ha, ha!"

He bent down to stare at Schomberg who sat unstirring

with stony eyes and set features, and apparently deaf to the rasping derision of that laughter so close to his red fleshy ear.

"Black plague too good for them, ha, ha!" Ricardo pressed the point on the tormented hotel-keeper. Schomberg kept his eyes down obstinately.

"I don't wish any harm to the girl," he muttered.

"But she did bolt from you? A fair bilk? Come!"

"Devil only knows what that villainous Swede had done to her—what he promised her, how he frightened her. She couldn't have cared for him, I know." Schomberg's vanity clung to the belief in some atrocious, extraordinary means of seduction employed by Heyst. "Look how he bewitched that poor Morrison," he murmured.

"Ah, Morrison—got all his money, what?"

"Yes—and his life."

"Terrible fellow, that Swedish baron! How is one to get at him?"

Schomberg exploded.

"Three against one! Are you shy? Do you want me to give you a letter of introduction?"

"You ought to look at yourself in a glass," Ricardo said quietly. "Dash me if you don't get a stroke of some kind presently. And this is the fellow who says women can do nothing! That one will do for you, unless you manage to forget her."

"I wish I could," Schomberg admitted earnestly. "And it's all the doing of that Swede. I don't get enough sleep, Mr. Ricardo. And then, to finish me off, you gentlemen turn up . . . as if I hadn't enough worry."

"That's done you good," suggested the Secretary with ironic seriousness. "Takes your mind off that silly trouble. At your age too."

He checked himself, as if in pity, and changing his tone:

"I would really like to oblige you while doing a stroke of business at the same time."

"A good stroke," insisted Schomberg, as if it were mechanically. In his simplicity he was not able to give up the idea which had entered his head. An idea must be driven out by another idea, and with Schomberg ideas

were rare and therefore tenacious. "Minted gold," he murmured with a sort of anguish.

Such an expressive combination of words was not without effect on Ricardo. Both these men were amenable to the influence of verbal suggestions. The Secretary of "plain Mr. Jones" sighed and murmured:

"Yes. But how is one to get at it?"

"Being three to one," said Schomberg, "I suppose you could get it for the asking."

"One would think the fellow lived next door," Ricardo growled impatiently. "Hang it all, can't you understand a plain question? I have asked you the way."

Schomberg seemed to revive.

"The way?"

The torpor of deceived hopes underlying his superficial changes of mood had been pricked by these words, which seemed pointed with purpose.

"The way is over the water, of course," said the hotel-keeper. "For people like you, three days in a good big boat is nothing. It's no more than a little outing, a bit of a change. At this season the Java Sea is a pond. I have an excellent, safe boat—a ship's life-boat—carry thirty, let alone three, and a child could handle her. You wouldn't get a wet face at this time of the year. You might call it a pleasure-trip."

"And yet, having this boat, you didn't go after her yourself—or after him? Well, you are a fine fellow for a disappointed lover."

Schomberg gave a start at the suggestion.

"I am not three men," he said sulkily, as the shortest answer of the several he could have given.

"Oh, I know your sort," Ricardo let fall negligently. "You are like most people—or perhaps just a little more peaceable than the rest of the buying and selling gang that bosses this rotten show. Well, well, you respectable citizen," he went on, "let us go thoroughly into the matter."

When Schomberg had been made to understand that Mr. Jones's henchman was ready to discuss, in his own words, "this boat of yours with courses and distances," and such concrete matters of no good augury to that

villainous Swede, he recovered his soldierly bearing, squared his shoulders, and asked in his military manner:

"You wish, then, to proceed with the business?"

Ricardo nodded. He had a great mind to, he said. A gentleman had to be humoured as much as possible; but he must be managed, too, on occasions, for his own good. And it was the business of the right sort of "follower" to know the proper time and the proper methods of that delicate part of his duty. Having exposed this theory Ricardo proceeded to the application.

"I've never actually lied to him," he said, "and I ain't going to now. I shall just say nothing about the girl. He will have to get over the shock the best he can. Hang it all! Too much humouring won't do here."

"Funny thing," Schomberg observed crisply.

"Is it? Ay, you wouldn't mind taking a woman by the throat in some dark corner and nobody by, I bet!"

Ricardo's dreadful, vicious, cat-like readiness to get his claws out at any moment startled Schomberg as usual. But it was provoking too.

"And you?" he defended himself. "Don't you want me to believe you are up to anything?"

"I, my boy? Oh, yes. I am not that gentleman; neither are you. Take 'em by the throat or chuck 'em under the chin is all one to me—almost," affirmed Ricardo, with something obscurely ironical in his complacency. "Now, as to this business. A three days' jaunt in a good boat isn't a thing to frighten people like us. You are right, so far; but there are other details."

Schomberg was ready enough to enter into details. He explained that he had a small plantation, with a fairly habitable hut on it, on Madura. He proposed that his guests should start from town in his boat, as if going for an excursion to that rural spot. The custom-house people on the quay were used to see his boat go off on such trips.

From Madura, after some repose and on a convenient day, Mr. Jones and party would make the real start. It would all be plain sailing. Schomberg undertook to

provision the boat. The greatest hardship the voyagers need apprehend would be a mild shower of rain. At that season of the year there were no serious thunderstorms.

Schomberg's heart began to thump as he saw himself nearing his vengeance. His speech was thick but persuasive.

"No risk at all—none whatever!"

Ricardo dismissed these assurances of safety with an impatient gesture. He was thinking of other risks.

"The getting away from here is all right; but we may be sighted at sea, and that may bring awkwardness later on. A ship's boat with three white men in her, knocking about out of sight of land, is bound to make talk. Are we likely to be seen on our way?"

"No, unless by native craft," said Schomberg.

Ricardo nodded, satisfied. Both these white men looked on native life as a mere play of shadows. A play of shadows the dominant race could walk through unaffected and disregarded in the pursuit of its incomprehensible aims and needs. No. Native craft did not count, of course. It was an empty, solitary part of the sea, Schomberg expounded further. Only the Ternate mail-boat crossed that region about the 8th of every month, regularly—nowhere near the island, though. Rigid, his voice hoarse, his heart thumping, his mind concentrated on the success of his plan, the hotel-keeper multiplied words, as if to keep as many of them as possible between himself and the murderous aspect of his purpose.

"So if you gentlemen depart from my plantation quietly at sunset on the 8th—always best to make a start at night, with a land breeze—it's a hundred to one—what am I saying?—it's a thousand to one that no human eye will see you on the passage. All you've got to do is to keep her heading northeast for, say, fifty hours; perhaps not quite so long. There will always be draft enough to keep a boat moving; you may reckon on that; and then—"

The muscles about his waist quivered under his clothes with eagerness, with impatience, and with something like

apprehension, the true nature of which was not clear to him. And he did not want to investigate it. Ricardo regarded him steadily, with those dry eyes of his shining more like polished stones than living tissue.

"And then what?" he asked.

"And then—why, you will astonish *der herr baron*—ha, ha!"

Schomberg seemed to force the words and the laugh out of himself in a hoarse bass.

"And you believe he has all that plunder by him?" asked Ricardo, rather perfunctorily, because the fact seemed to him extremely probable when looked at all round by his acute mind.

Schomberg raised his hands and lowered them slowly.

"How can it be otherwise? He was going home, he was on his way, in this hotel. Ask people. Was it likely he would leave it behind him?"

Ricardo was thoughtful. Then, suddenly raising his head, he remarked:

"Steer northeast for fifty hours, eh? That's not much of a sailing direction. I've heard of a port being missed before on better information. Can't you say what sort of landfall a fellow may expect? But I suppose you have never seen that island yourself."

Schomberg admitted that he had not seen it, in a tone in which a man congratulates himself on having escaped the contamination of an unsavoury experience. No, certainly not. He had never had any business to call him there. But what of that? He could give Mr. Ricardo as good a sea-mark as anybody need wish for. He laughed nervously. Miss it! He defied any one that came within forty miles of it to miss the retreat of that villainous Swede.

"What do you think of a pillar of smoke by day and a loom of fire at night? There's a volcano in full blast near that island—enough to guide almost a blind man. What more do you want? An active volcano to steer by!"

These last words he roared out exultingly, then jumped up and glared. The door to the left of the bar had swung

open, and Mrs. Schomberg, dressed for duty, stood facing him down the whole length of the room. She clung to the handle for a moment, then came in and glided to her place, where she sat down to stare straight before her, as usual.

PART III

I

TROPICAL nature had been kind to the failure of the commercial enterprise. The desolation of the headquarters of the Tropical Belt Coal Company had been screened from the side of the sea; from the side where prying eyes—if any were sufficiently interested, either in malice or in sorrow—could have noted the decaying bones of that once sanguine enterprise.

Heyst had been sitting among the bones buried so kindly in the grass of two wet seasons' growth. The silence of his surroundings, broken only by such sounds as a distant roll of thunder, the lash of rain through the foliage of some big trees, the noise of the wind tossing the leaves of the forest, and of the short seas breaking against the shore, favoured rather than hindered his solitary meditation.

A meditation is always—in a white man, at least—more or less an interrogative exercise. Heyst meditated in simple terms on the mystery of his actions; and he answered himself with the honest reflection:

"There must be a lot of the original Adam in me, after all."

He reflected, too, with the sense of making a discovery, that this primeval ancestor is not easily suppressed. The oldest voice in the world is just the one that never ceases to speak. If anybody could have silenced its imperative echoes, it should have been Heyst's father, with his contemptuous, inflexible negation of all effort; but apparently he could not. There was in the son a lot of that first ancestor who, as soon as he could uplift his muddy frame from the celestial mould, started inspecting and naming

the animals of that paradise which he was so soon to lose.

Action—the first thought, or perhaps the first impulse, on earth! The barbed hook, baited with the illusion of progress, to bring out of the lightless void the shoals of unnumbered generations!

"And I, the son of my father, have been caught too, like the silliest fish of them all," Heyst said to himself.

He suffered. He was hurt by the sight of his own life, which ought to have been a masterpiece of aloofness. He remembered always his last evening with his father. He remembered the thin features, the great mass of white hair, and the ivory complexion. A five-branched candlestick stood on a little table by the side of the easy chair. They had been talking a long time. The noises of the street had died out one by one, till at last, in the moonlight, the London houses began to look like the tombs of an unvisited, unhonoured, cemetery of hopes.

He had listened. Then, after a silence, he had asked—for he was really young then:

"Is there no guidance?"

His father was in an unexpectedly soft mood on that night, when the moon swam in a cloudless sky over the begrimed shadows of the town.

"You still believe in something, then?" he said in a clear voice, which had been growing feeble of late. "You believe in flesh and blood, perhaps? A full and equable contempt would soon do away with that, too. But since you have not attained to it, I advise you to cultivate that form of contempt which is called pity. It is perhaps the least difficult—always remembering that you, too, if you are anything, are as pitiful as the rest, yet never expecting any pity for yourself."

"What is one to do, then?" sighed the young man, regarding his father, rigid in the high-backed chair.

"Look on—make no sound," were the last words of the man who had spent his life in blowing blasts upon a terrible trumpet which had filled heaven and earth with ruins, while mankind went on its way unheeding.

That very night he died in his bed, so quietly that

they found him in his usual attitude of sleep, lying on his side, one hand under his cheek, and his knees slightly bent. He had not even straightened his legs.

His son buried the silenced destroyer of systems, of hopes, of beliefs. He observed that the death of that bitter contemner of life did not trouble the flow of life's stream, where men and women go by thick as dust, revolving and jostling one another like figures cut out of cork and weighted with lead just sufficiently to keep them in their proudly upright posture.

After the funeral, Heyst sat alone, in the dusk, and his meditation took the form of a definite vision of the stream, of the fatuously jostling, nodding, spinning figures hurried irresistibly along, and giving no sign of being aware that the voice on the bank had been suddenly silenced. . . . Yes. A few obituary notices generally insignificant and some grossly abusive. The son had read them all with mournful detachment.

"This is the hate and rage of their fear," he thought to himself, "and also of wounded vanity. They shriek their little shriek as they fly past. I suppose I ought to hate him too. . . ."

He became aware of his eyes being wet. It was not that the man was his father. For him it was purely a matter of hearsay which could not in itself cause this emotion. No! It was because he had looked at him so long that he missed him so much. The dead man had kept him on the bank by his side. And now Heyst felt acutely that he was alone on the bank of the stream. In his pride he determined not to enter it.

A few slow tears rolled down his face. The rooms, filling with shadows, seemed haunted by a melancholy, uneasy presence which could not express itself. The young man got up with a strange sense of making way for something impalpable that claimed possession, went out of the house, and locked the door. A fortnight later he started on his travels—to "look on and never make a sound."

The elder Heyst had left behind him a little money and a certain quantity of movable objects, such as books,

tables, chairs, and pictures, which might have complained of heartless desertion after many years of faithful service; for there is a soul in things. Heyst, our Heyst, had often thought of them, reproachful and mute, shrouded and locked up in those rooms, far away in London with the sounds of the street reaching them faintly, and sometimes a little sunshine, when the blinds were pulled up and the windows opened from time to time in pursuance of his original instructions and later reminders. It seemed as if in his conception of a world not worth touching, and perhaps not substantial enough to grasp, these objects familiar to his childhood and his youth and associated with the memory of an old man, were the only realities, something having an absolute existence. He would never have them sold, or even moved from the places they occupied when he looked upon them last. When he was advised from London that his lease had expired, and that the house, with some others as like it as two peas, was to be demolished, he was surprisingly distressed.

He had entered by then the broad, human path of inconsistencies. Already the Tropical Belt Coal Company was in existence. He sent instructions to have some of the things sent out to him at Samburan, just as any ordinary, credulous person would have done. They came, torn out from their long repose—a lot of books, some chairs and tables, his father's portrait in oils, which surprised Heyst by its air of youth, because he remembered his father as a much older man; a lot of small objects, such as candlesticks, inkstands, and statuettes from his father's study, which surprised him because they looked so old and so much worn.

The manager of the Tropical Belt Coal Company, unpacking them on the veranda in the shade besieged by a fierce sunshine, must have felt like a remorseful apostate before these relics. He handled them tenderly; and it was perhaps their presence there which attached him to the island when he woke up to the failure of his apostasy. Whatever the decisive reason, Heyst had remained where another would have been glad to be off. The excellent Davidson had discovered the fact without discovering

the reason, and took a humane interest in Heyst's strange existence, while at the same time his native delicacy kept him from intruding on the other's whim of solitude. He could not possibly guess that Heyst, alone on the island, felt neither more nor less lonely than in any other place, desert or populous. Davidson's concern was, if one may express it so, the danger of spiritual starvation; but this was a spirit which had renounced all outside nourishment, and was sustaining itself proudly on its own contempt of the usual coarse aliments which life offers to the common appetites of men.

Neither was Heyst's body in danger of starvation, as Schomberg had so confidently asserted. At the beginning of the company's operations the island had been provisioned in a manner which had outlasted the need. Heyst did not need to fear hunger; and his very loneliness had not been without some alleviation. Of the crowd of imported Chinese labourers, one at least had remained in Samburan, solitary and strange, like a swallow left behind at the migrating season of his tribe.

Wang was not a common coolie. He had been a servant to white men before. The agreement between him and Heyst consisted in the exchange of a few words on the day when the last batch of the mine coolies was leaving Samburan. Heyst, leaning over the balustrade of the veranda, was looking on, as calm in appearance as though he had never departed from the doctrine that this world, for the wise, is nothing but an amusing spectacle. Wang came round the house, and, standing below, raised up his yellow, thin face.

"All finish?" he asked.

Heyst nodded slightly from above, glancing towards the jetty. A crowd of blue-clad figures with yellow faces and calves was being hustled down into the boats of the chartered steamer lying well out, like a painted ship on a painted sea; painted in crude colours, without shadows, without feeling, with brutal precision.

"You had better hurry up if you don't want to be left behind."

But the Chinaman did not move.

"Me stop," he declared. Heyst looked down at him for the first time.

"You want to stop here?"

"Yes."

"What were you? What was your work here?"

"Mess-loom boy."

"Do you want to stay with me here as my boy?" inquired Heyst, surprised.

The Chinaman unexpectedly put on a deprecatory expression, and said, after a marked pause:

"Can do."

"You needn't," said Heyst, "unless you like. I propose to stay on here—it may be for a very long time. I have no power to make you go if you wish to remain, but I don't see why you should."

"Catchee one piecee wife," remarked Wang unemotionally, and marched off, turning his back on the wharf and the great world beyond, represented by the steamer waiting for her boats.

Heyst learned presently that Wang had persuaded one of the women of the Alfuro village, on the west shore of the island, beyond the central ridge, to come over to live with him in a remote part of the company's clearing. It was a curious case, inasmuch as the Alfuros, having been frightened by the sudden invasion of Chinamen, had blocked the path over the ridge by felling a few trees, and had kept strictly on their own side. The coolies, as a body, mistrusting the manifest mildness of these harmless fisherfolk, had kept to their lines, without attempting to cross the island. Wang was the brilliant exception. He must have been uncommonly fascinating, in a way that was not apparent to Heyst, or else uncommonly persuasive. The woman's services to Heyst were limited to the fact that she had anchored Wang to the spot by her charms, which remained unknown to the white man, because she never came near the houses. The couple lived at the edge of the forest, and she could sometimes be seen gazing toward the bungalow shading her eyes with her hand. Even from a distance she appeared to be a shy, wild creature, and Heyst, anxious not to try her primitive

nerves unduly, scrupulously avoided that side of the clearing in his strolls.

The day—or rather the first night—after his hermit life began, he was aware of vague sounds of revelry in that direction. Emboldened by the departure of the invading strangers, some Alfuros, the woman's friends and relations, had ventured over the ridge to attend something in the nature of a wedding feast. Wang had invited them. But this was the only occasion when any sound louder than the buzzing of insects had troubled the profound silence of the clearing. The natives were never invited again. Wang not only knew how to live according to conventional proprieties, but had strong personal views as to the manner of arranging his domestic existence. After a time Heyst perceived that Wang had annexed all the keys. Any key left lying about vanished after Wang had passed that way. Subsequently some of them—those that did not belong to the storerooms and the empty bungalows, and could not be regarded as the common property of this community of two—were returned to Heyst, tied in a bunch with a piece of string. He found them one morning lying by the side of his plate. He had not been inconvenienced by their absence, because he never locked up anything in the way of drawers and boxes. Heyst said nothing. Wang also said nothing. Perhaps he had always been a taciturn man; perhaps he was influenced by the genius of the locality, which was certainly that of silence. Till Heyst and Morrison had landed in Black Diamond Bay, and named it, that side of Samburan had hardly ever heard the sound of human speech. It was easy to be taciturn with Heyst, who had plunged himself into an abyss of meditation over books, and remained in it till the shadow of Wang falling across the page, and the sound of a rough, low voice uttering the Malay word "*makan*," would force him to climb out to a meal.

Wang in his native province in China might have been an aggressively, sensitively genial person; but in Samburan he had clothed himself in a mysterious stolidity and did not seem to resent not being spoken to except in single words, at a rate which did not average half a dozen per day. And

he gave no more than he got. It is to be presumed that if he suffered constraint, he made up for it with the Alfuro woman. He always went back to her at the first fall of dusk, vanishing from the bungalow suddenly at his hour, like a sort of topsyturvy, day-haunting Chinese ghost with a white jacket and a pigtail. Presently, giving way to a Chinaman's ruling passion, he could be observed breaking the ground near his hut, between the mighty stumps of felled trees, with a miner's pick-axe. After a time, he discovered a rusty but serviceable spade in one of the empty storerooms, and it is to be supposed that he got on famously; but nothing of it could be seen, because he went to the trouble of pulling to pieces one of the company's sheds in order to get materials for making a high and very close fence round his patch, as if the growing of vegetables were a patented process, or an awful and holy mystery entrusted to the keeping of his race.

Heyst, following from a distance the progress of Wang's gardening and of these precautions—there was nothing else to look at—was amused at the thought that he, in his own person, represented the market for its produce. The Chinaman had found several packets of seeds in the storerooms, and had surrendered to an irresistible impulse to put them into the ground. He would make his master pay for the vegetables which he was raising to satisfy his instinct. And, looking silently at the silent Wang going about his work in the bungalow in his unhasty, steady way, Heyst envied the Chinaman's obedience to his instincts, the powerful simplicity of purpose which made his existence appear almost automatic in the mysterious precision of its facts.

II

DURING his master's absence at Sourabaya, Wang had busied himself with the ground immediately in front of the principal bungalow. Emerging from the fringe of grass growing across the shore end of the coal-jetty, Heyst beheld a broad, clear space, black and level,

with only one or two clumps of charred twigs, where the flame had swept from the front of his house to the nearest trees of the forest.

"You took the risk of firing the grass?" Heyst asked.

Wang nodded. Hanging on the arm of the white man before whom he stood was the girl called Alma; but neither from the Chinaman's eyes nor from his expression could any one have guessed that he was in the slightest degree aware of the fact.

"He has been tidying the place in this labour-saving way," explained Heyst, without looking at the girl, whose hand rested on his forearm. "He's the whole establishment, you see. I told you I hadn't even a dog to keep me company here."

Wang had marched off toward the wharf.

"He's like those waiters in that place," she said. That place was Schomberg's hotel.

"One Chinaman looks very much like another," Heyst remarked. "We shall find it useful to have him here. This is the house."

They faced, at some distance, the six shallow steps leading up to the veranda. The girl had abandoned Heyst's arm.

"This is the house," he repeated.

She did not offer to budge away from his side, but stood staring fixedly at the steps, as if they had been something unique and impracticable. He waited a little, but she did not move.

"Don't you want to go in?" he asked, without turning his head to look at her. "The sun's too heavy to stand about here." He tried to overcome a sort of fear, a sort of impatient faintness, and his voice sounded rough. "You had better go in," he concluded.

They both moved then, but at the foot of the stairs Heyst stopped, while the girl went on rapidly, as if nothing could stop her now. She crossed the veranda swiftly, and entered the twilight of the big central room opening upon it, and then the deeper twilight of the room beyond. She stood still in the dusk, in which her dazzled eyes could scarcely make out the forms of objects, and sighed a sigh of

relief. The impression of the sunlight, of sea and sky, remained with her like a memory of a painful trial gone through—done with at last!

Meanwhile Heyst had walked back slowly toward the jetty; but he did not get so far as that. The practical and automatic Wang had got hold of one of the little trucks that had been used for running baskets of coal alongside ships. He appeared pushing it before him, loaded lightly with Heyst's bag and the bundle of the girl's belongings, wrapped in Mrs. Schomberg's shawl. Heyst turned about and walked by the side of the rusty rails on which the truck ran. Opposite the house Wang stopped, lifted the bag to his shoulder, balanced it carefully, and then took the bundle in his hand.

"Leave those things on the table in the big room—understand?"

"Me savee," grunted Wang, moving off.

Heyst watched the Chinaman disappear from the veranda. It was not till he had seen Wang come out that he himself entered the twilight of the big room. By that time Wang was out of sight at the back of the house, but by no means out of hearing. The Chinaman could hear the voice of him who, when there were many people there, was generally referred to as "Number One." Wang was not able to understand the words, but the tone interested him.

"Where are you?" cried Number One.

Then Wang heard, much more faint, a voice he had never heard before—a novel impression which he acknowledged by cocking his head slightly to one side.

"I am here—out of the sun."

The new voice sounded remote and uncertain. Wang heard nothing more, though he waited for some time, very still, the top of his shaven poll exactly level with the floor of the back veranda. His face meanwhile preserved an inscrutable immobility. Suddenly he stooped to pick up the lid of a deal candle-box which was lying on the ground by his foot. Breaking it up with his fingers, he directed his steps toward the cook-shed, where, squatting on his heels, he proceeded to kindle a small fire under a very sooty

kettle, possibly to make tea. Wang had some knowledge of the more superficial rites and ceremonies of white men's existence, otherwise so enigmatically remote to his mind, and containing unexpected possibilities of good and evil, which had to be watched for with prudence and care.

III

THAT morning, as on all the others of the full tale of mornings since his return with the girl to Samburan, Heyst came out on the veranda and spread his elbows on the railing, in an easy attitude of proprietorship. The bulk of the central ridge of the island cut off the bungalow from sunrises, whether glorious or cloudy, angry or serene. The dwellers therein were debarred from reading early the fortune of the new-born day. It sprang upon them in its fulness with a swift retreat of the great shadow when the sun, clearing the ridge, looked down, hot and dry, with a devouring glare like the eye of an enemy. But Heyst, once the Number One of this locality, while it was comparatively teeming with mankind, appreciated the prolongation of early coolness, the subdued, lingering half light, the faint ghost of the departed night, the fragrance of its dewy, dark soul captured for a moment longer between the great glow of the sky and the intense blaze of the uncovered sea.

It was naturally difficult for Heyst to keep his mind from dwelling on the nature and consequences of this, his latest departure from the part of an unconcerned spectator. Yet he had retained enough of his wrecked philosophy to prevent him from asking himself consciously how it would end. But at the same time he could not help being temperamentally, from long habit and from set purpose, a spectator still, perhaps a little less naïve but (as he discovered with some surprise) not much more far-sighted than the common run of men. Like the rest of us who act, all he could say to himself, with a somewhat affected grimness, was :

"We shall see!"

This mood of grim doubt intruded on him only when he was alone. There were not many such moments in his day now; and he did not like them when they came. On this morning he had no time to grow uneasy. Alma came out to join him long before the sun, rising above the Samburan ridge, swept the cool shadow of the early morning and the remnant of the night's coolness clear off the roof under which they had dwelt for more than three months already. She came out as on other mornings. He had heard her light footsteps in the big room—the room where he had unpacked the cases from London; the room now lined with the backs of books half-way up on its three sides. Above the cases the fine matting met the ceiling of tightly stretched white calico. In the dusk and coolness nothing gleamed except the gilt frame of the portrait of Heyst's father, signed by a famous painter, lonely in the middle of a wall.

Heyst did not turn round.

"Do you know what I was thinking of?" he asked.

"No," she said. Her tone betrayed always a shade of anxiety, as though she were never certain how a conversation with him would end. She leaned on the guard-rail by his side.

"No," she repeated. "What was it?" She waited. Then, rather with reluctance than shyness, she asked: "Were you thinking of me?"

"I was wondering when you would come out," said Heyst still without looking at the girl—to whom, after several experimental essays in combining detached letters and loose syllables, he had given the name of Lena.

She remarked after a pause:

"I was not very far from you."

"Apparently you were not near enough for me."

"You could have called if you wanted me," she said. "And I wasn't so long doing my hair."

"Apparently it was too long for me."

"Well, you were thinking of me, anyhow. I am glad of it. Do you know, it seems to me, somehow, that if

you were to stop thinking of me I shouldn't be in the world at all!"

He turned round and looked at her. She often said things which surprised him. A vague smile faded away on her lips before his scrutiny.

"What is it?" he asked. "Is it a reproach?"

"A reproach! Why, how could it be?" she defended herself.

"Well, what did it mean?" he insisted.

"What I said—just what I said. Why aren't you fair?"

"Ah, this at least is a reproach!"

She coloured to the roots of her hair.

"It looks as if you were trying to make out that I am disagreeable," she murmured. "Am I? You will make me afraid to open my mouth presently. I shall end by believing I am no good."

Her head drooped a little. He looked at her smooth, low brow, the faintly coloured cheeks and the red lips parted slightly, with the gleam of her teeth within.

"And then I *won't* be any good," she added with conviction. "That I won't! I can only be what you think I am."

He made a slight movement. She put her hand on his arm, without raising her head, and went on, her voice animated in the stillness of her body:

"It is so. It couldn't be any other way with a girl like me and a man like you. Here we are, we two alone, and I can't even tell where we are."

"A very well-known spot of the globe," Heyst uttered gently. "There must have been at least fifty thousand circulars issued at the time—a hundred and fifty thousand, more likely. My friend was looking after that, and his ideas were large and his belief very strong. Of us two it was he who had the faith. A hundred and fifty thousand, certainly."

"What is it you mean?" she asked in a low tone.

"What should I find fault with you for?" Heyst went on. "For being amiable, good, gracious—and pretty?"

A silence fell. Then she said:

"It's all right that you should think that of me. There's no one here to think anything of us, good or bad."

The rare timbre of her voice gave a special value to what she uttered. The indefinable emotion which certain intonations gave him, he was aware, was more physical than moral. Every time she spoke to him she seemed to abandon to him something of herself—something excessively subtle and inexpressible, to which he was infinitely sensible, which he would have missed horribly if she were to go away. While he was looking into her eyes she raised her bare forearm, out of the short sleeve, and held it in the air till he noticed it and hastened to pose his great bronze moustaches on the whiteness of the skin. Then they went in.

Wang immediately appeared in front, and, squatting on his heels, began to potter mysteriously about some plants at the foot of the veranda. When Heyst and the girl came out again, the Chinaman had gone in his peculiar manner, which suggested vanishing out of existence rather than out of sight, a process of evaporation rather than of movement. They descended the steps, looking at each other, and started off smartly across the cleared ground; but they were not ten yards away when, without perceptible stir or sound, Wang materialised inside the empty room. The Chinaman stood still with roaming eyes, examining the walls as if for signs, for inscriptions; exploring the floor as if for pitfalls, for dropped coins. Then he cocked his head slightly at the profile of Heyst's father, pen in hand above a white sheet of paper on a crimson tablecloth; and, moving forward noiselessly, began to clear away the breakfast things.

Though he proceeded without haste, the unerring precision of his movements, the absolute soundlessness of the operation, gave it something of the quality of a conjuring trick. And, the trick having been performed, Wang vanished from the scene, to materialise presently in front of the house. He materialised walking away from it, with no visible or guessable intention; but at the end of some ten paces he stopped, made a half turn, and put his hand up to shade his eyes. The sun had topped the grey ridge

of Samburan. The great morning shadow was gone; and far away in the devouring sunshine Wang was in time to see Number One and the woman, two remote white specks against the sombre line of the forest. In a moment they vanished. With the smallest display of action, Wang also vanished from the sunlight of the clearing.

Heyst and Lena entered the shade of the forest path which crossed the island, and which, near its highest point, had been blocked by felled trees. But their intention was not to go so far. After keeping to the path for some distance, they left it at a point where the forest was bare of undergrowth, and the trees, festooned with creepers, stood clear of one another in the gloom of their own making. Here and there great splashes of light lay on the ground. They moved, silent in the great stillness, breathing the calmness, the infinite isolation, the repose of a slumber without dreams. They emerged at the upper limit of vegetation, among some rocks; and in a depression of the sharp slope, like a small platform, they turned about and looked from on high over the sea, lonely, its colour effaced by sunshine, its horizon a heat mist, a mere unsubstantial shimmer in the pale and blinding infinity overhung by the darker blaze of the sky.

"It makes my head swim," the girl murmured, shutting her eyes and putting her hand on his shoulder.

Heyst, gazing fixedly to the southward, exclaimed:

"Sail ho!"

A moment of silence ensued.

"It must be very far away," he went on. "I don't think you could see it. Some native craft making for the Moluccas, probably. Come, we mustn't stay here."

With his arm round her waist, he led her down a little distance, and they settled themselves in the shade; she seated on the ground, he a little lower, reclining at her feet.

"You don't like to look at the sea from up there?" he said after a time.

She shook her head. That empty space was to her the abomination of desolation. But she only said again:

"It makes my head swim."

"Too big?" he inquired.

"Too lonely. It makes my heart sink, too," she added in a low voice, as if confessing a secret.

"I am afraid," said Heyst, "that you would be justified in reproaching me for these sensations. But what would you have?"

His tone was playful, but his eyes, directed at her face, were serious. She protested.

"I am not feeling lonely with you—not a bit. It is only when we come up to that place, and I look at all that water and all that light—"

"We will never come here again, then," he interrupted her.

She remained silent for a while, returning his gaze till he removed it.

"It seems as if everything that there is had gone under," she said.

"Reminds you of the story of the deluge," muttered the man, stretched at her feet and looking at them. "Are you frightened at it?"

"I should be rather frightened to be left behind alone. When I say *I*, of course I mean we."

"Do you?" . . . Heyst remained silent for a while. "The vision of a world destroyed," he mused aloud. "Would you be sorry for it?"

"I should be sorry for the happy people in it," she said simply.

His gaze travelled up her figure and reached her face, where he seemed to detect the veiled glow of intelligence, as one gets a glimpse of the sun through the clouds.

"I should have thought it's they specially who ought to have been congratulated. Don't you?"

"Oh, yes—I understand what you mean; but there were forty days before it was all over."

"You seem to be in possession of all the details."

Heyst spoke just to say something rather than to gaze at her in silence. She was not looking at him.

"Sunday school," she murmured. "I went regularly from the time I was eight till I was thirteen. We lodged in the north of London, off Kingsland Road. It wasn't

a bad time. Father was earning good money then. The woman of the house used to pack me off in the afternoon with her own girls. She was a good woman. Her husband was in the post-office. Sorter or something. Such a quiet man. He used to go off after supper for night duty, sometimes. Then one day they had a row, and broke up the home. I remember I cried when we had to pack up all of a sudden and go into other lodgings. I never knew what it was, though—"

"The deluge," muttered Heyst absently.

He felt intensely aware of her personality, as if this were the first moment of leisure he had found to look at her since they had come together. The peculiar timbre of her voice, with its modulations of audacity and sadness, would have given interest to the most inane chatter. But she was no chatterer. She was rather silent, with a capacity for immobility, an upright stillness, as when resting on the concert platform between the musical numbers, her feet crossed, her hands reposing on her lap. But in the intimacy of their life her grey, unabashed gaze forced upon him the sensation of something inexplicable resposing within her; stupidity or inspiration, weakness or force—or simply an abysmal emptiness, reserving itself even in the moments of complete surrender.

During a long pause she did not look at him. Then suddenly, as if the word "deluge" had stuck in her mind, she asked, looking up at the cloudless sky:

"Does it ever rain here?"

"There is a season when it rains almost every day," said Heyst, surprised. "There are also thunderstorms. We had once a mud-shower."

"Mud-shower?"

"Our neighbour there was shooting up ashes. He sometimes clears his red-hot gullet like that; and a thunderstorm came along at the same time. It was very messy; but our neighbour is generally well behaved—just smokes quietly, as he did that day when I first showed you the smudge in the sky from the schooner's deck. He's a good-natured, lazy fellow of a volcano."

"I saw a mountain smoking like that before," she

said, staring at the slender stem of a tree-fern some dozen feet in front of her. "It wasn't very long after we left England—some few days, though. I was so ill at first that I lost count of days. A smoking mountain—I can't think how they called it."

"Vesuvius, perhaps," suggested Heyst.

"That's the name."

"I saw it, too, years, ages ago," said Heyst.

"On your way here?"

"No, long before I ever thought of coming into this part of the world. I was yet a boy."

She turned and looked at him attentively, as if seeking to discover some trace of that boyhood in the mature face of the man with the hair thin at the top and the long, thick moustaches. Heyst stood the frank examination with a playful smile, hiding the profound effect these veiled grey eyes produced—whether on his heart or on his nerves, whether sensuous or spiritual, tender or irritating, he was unable to say.

"Well, princess of Samburan," he said at last, "have I found favour in your sight?"

She seemed to wake up, and shook her head.

"I was thinking," she murmured very low.

"Thought, action—so many snares! If you begin to think you will be unhappy."

"I wasn't thinking of myself," she declared with a simplicity which took Heyst aback somewhat.

"On the lips of a moralist this would sound like a rebuke," he said, half seriously; "but I won't suspect you of being one. Moralists and I haven't been friends for many years."

She had listened with an air of attention.

"I understood you had no friends," she said. "I am pleased that there's nobody to find fault with you for what you have done. I like to think that I am in no one's way."

Heyst would have said something, but she did not give him time. Unconscious of the movement he made, she went on:

"What I was thinking to myself was, why are you here?"

Heyst let himself sink on his elbow again.

"If by 'you' you mean 'we'—well, you know why we are here."

She bent her gaze down at him.

"No, it isn't that. I meant before—all that time before you came across me and guessed at once that I was in trouble, with no one to turn to. And you know it was desperate trouble, too."

Her voice fell on the last words, as if she would end there; but there was something so expectant in Heyst's attitude as he sat at her feet, looking up at her steadily, that she continued, after drawing a short, quick breath:

"It was, really. I told you I had been worried before by bad fellows. It made me unhappy, disturbed—angry, too. But oh, how I hated, hated, *hated* that man!"

"That man" was the florid Schomberg with the military bearing, benefactor of white men ("decent food to eat in decent company")—mature victim of belated passion. The girl shuddered. The characteristic harmoniousness of her face became, as it were, decomposed for an instant. Heyst was startled.

"Why think of it now?" he cried.

"It's because I was cornered that time. It wasn't as before. It was worse, ever so much. I wished I could die of my fright;—and yet it's only now that I begin to understand what a horror it might have been. Yes, only now, since we—"

Heyst stirred a little.

"Came here," he finished.

Her tenseness relaxed, her flushed face went gradually back to its normal tint.

"Yes," she said indifferently, but at the same time she gave him a stealthy glance of passionate appreciation; and then her face took on a melancholy cast, her whole figure drooped imperceptibly. "But you were coming back here anyhow?" she asked.

"Yes. I was only waiting for Davidson. Yes, I was coming back here, to these ruins—to Wang, who perhaps did not expect to see me again. It's impossible to guess

at the way that Chinaman draws his conclusions, and how he looks upon one."

"Don't talk about him. He makes me feel uncomfortable. Talk about yourself."

"About myself! I see you are still busy with the mystery of my existence here; but it isn't at all mysterious. Primarily the man with the quill pen in his hand in that picture you so often look at is responsible for my existence. He is also responsible for what my existence is, or rather has been. He was a great man in his way. I don't know much of his history. I suppose he began like other people; took fine words for good, ringing coin and noble ideals for valuable banknotes. He was a great master of both, himself, by the way. Later he discovered—how am I to explain it to you? Suppose the world were a factory and all mankind workmen in it. Well, he discovered that the wages were not good enough. That they were paid in counterfeit money."

"I see!" the girl said slowly.

"Do you?"

Heyst, who had been speaking as if to himself, looked up curiously.

"It wasn't a new discovery, but he brought his capacity for scorn to bear on it. It was immense. It ought to have withered this globe. I don't know how many minds he convinced. But my mind was very young then, and youth I suppose can be easily seduced—even by a negation. He was very ruthless, and yet he was not without pity. He dominated me without difficulty. A heartless man could not have done so. Even to fools he was not utterly merciless. He could be indignant, but he was too great for flouts and jeers. What he said was not meant for the crowd; it could not be; and I was flattered to find myself among the elect. They read his books, but I have heard his living word. It was irresistible. It was as if that mind were taking me into its confidence, giving me a special insight into its mastery of despair. Mistake, no doubt. There is something of my father in every man who lives long enough. But they don't say anything. They can't. They wouldn't know how, or perhaps, they

wouldn't speak if they could. Man on this earth is an unforeseen accident which does not stand close investigation. However, that particular man died as quietly as a child goes to sleep. But, after listening to him, I could not take my soul down into the street to fight there. I started off to wander about, an independent spectator—if that is possible."

For a long time the girl's grey eyes had been watching his face. She discovered that, addressing her, he was really talking to himself. Heyst looked up, caught sight of her as it were, and caught himself up, with a low laugh and a change of tone.

"All this does not tell you why I ever came here. Why, indeed? It's like prying into inscrutable mysteries which are not worth scrutinising. A man drifts. The most successful men have drifted into their successes. I don't want to tell you that this is a success. You wouldn't believe me if I did. It isn't; neither is it the ruinous failure it looks. It proves nothing, unless perhaps some hidden weakness in my character—and even that is not certain."

He looked fixedly at her, and with such grave eyes that she felt obliged to smile faintly at him, since she did not understand what he meant. Her smile was reflected, still fainter, on his lips.

"This does not advance you much in your inquiry," he went on. "And in truth your question is unanswerable; but facts have a certain positive value, and I will tell you a fact. One day I met a cornered man. I use the word because it expresses the man's situation exactly, and because you just used it yourself. You know what that means?"

"What do you say?" she whispered, astounded. "A man!"

Heyst laughed at her wondering eyes.

"No! No! I mean in his own way."

"I knew very well it couldn't be anything like that," she observed under her breath.

"I won't bother you with the story. It was a custom-house affair, strange as it may sound to you. He would

have preferred to be killed outright—that is, to have his soul despatched to another world, rather than to be robbed of his substance, his very insignificant substance, in this. I saw that he believed in another world because, being cornered, as I have told you, he went down on his knees and prayed. What do you think of that?"

Heyst paused. She looked at him earnestly.

"You didn't make fun of him for that?" she said.

Heyst made a brusque movement of protest.

"My dear girl, I am not a ruffian," he cried. Then, returning to his usual tone: "I didn't even have to conceal a smile. Somehow it didn't look a smiling matter. No, it was not funny; it was rather pathetic; he was so representative of all the past victims of the Great Joke. But it is by folly alone that the world moves, and so it is a respectable thing upon the whole. And besides, he was what one would call a good man. I don't mean especially because he had offered up a prayer. No! He was really a decent fellow, he was quite unfitted for this world, he was a failure, a good man cornered—a sight for the gods; for no decent mortal cares to look at that sort." A thought seemed to occur to him. He turned his face to the girl. "And you, who have been cornered too—did you think of offering a prayer?"

Neither her eyes nor a single one of her features moved the least bit. She only let fall the words:

"I am not what they call a good girl."

"That sounds evasive," said Heyst after a short silence. "Well, the good fellow did pray, and after he had confessed to it I was struck by the comicality of the situation. No, don't misunderstand me—I am not alluding to his act, of course. And even the idea of Eternity, Infinity, Omnipotence, being called upon to defeat the conspiracy of two miserable Portuguese half-castes did not move my mirth. From the point of view of the supplicant, the danger to be conjured was something like the end of the world, or worse. No! What captivated my fancy was that I, Axel Heyst, the most detached of creatures in this earthly captivity, the veriest tramp on this earth, an indifferent stroller going through the world's bustle—that

I should have been there to step into the situation of an agent of Providence. *I*, a man of universal scorn and unbelief. . . ."

"You are putting it on," she interrupted in her seductive voice, with a coaxing intonation.

"No. I am like that, born or fashioned, or both. I am not for nothing the son of my father, of that man in the painting. I am he, all but the genius. And there is even less in me than I make out, because the very scorn is falling away from me year after year. I have never been so amused as by that episode in which I was suddenly called to act such an incredible part. For a moment I enjoyed it greatly. I got him out of his corner, you know."

"You saved a man for fun—is that what you mean? Just for fun?"

"Why this tone of suspicion?" remonstrated Heyst. "I suppose the sight of this particular distress was disagreeable to me. What you call fun came afterward, when it dawned on me that I was for him a walking, breathing, incarnate proof of the efficacy of prayer. I was a little fascinated by it—and then, could I have argued with him? You don't argue against such evidence, and besides it would have looked as if I had wanted to claim all the merit. Already his gratitude was simply frightful. Funny position, wasn't it? The boredom came later, when we lived together on board his ship. I had, in a moment of inadvertence, created for myself a tie. How to define it precisely I don't know. One gets attached in a way to people one has done something for. But is that friendship? I am not sure what it was. I only know that he who forms a tie is lost. The germ of corruption has entered into his soul."

Heyst's tone was light, with the flavour of playfulness which seasoned all his speeches and seemed to be of the very essence of his thoughts. The girl he had come across, of whom he had possessed himself, to whose presence he was not yet accustomed, with whom he did not yet know how to live; that human being so near and still so strange, gave him a greater sense of his own reality than he had ever known in all his life.

IV

WITH her knees drawn up, Lena rested her elbows on them and held her head in both her hands.

"Are you tired of sitting here?" Heyst asked.

An almost imperceptible negative movement of the head was all the answer she made.

"Why are you looking so serious?" he pursued, and immediately thought that habitual seriousness, in the long run, was much more bearable than constant gaiety. "However, this expression suits you exceedingly," he added, not diplomatically, but because, by the tendency of his taste, it was a true statement. "And as long as I can be certain that it is not boredom which gives you this severe air, I am willing to sit here and look at you till you are ready to go."

And this was true. He was still under the fresh sortilege of their common life, the surprise of novelty, the flattered vanity of his possession of this woman; for a man must feel that, unless he has ceased to be masculine. Her eyes moved in his direction, rested on him, then returned to their stare into the deeper gloom at the foot of the straight tree-trunks, whose spreading crowns were slowly withdrawing their shade. The warm air stirred slightly about her motionless head. She would not look at him, from some obscure fear of betraying herself. She felt in her innermost depths an irresistible desire to give herself up to him more completely, by some act of absolute sacrifice. This was something of which he did not seem to have an idea. He was a strange being without needs. She felt his eyes fixed upon her; and as he kept silent, she said uneasily —for she didn't know what his silences might mean:

"And so you lived with that friend—that good man?"

"Excellent fellow," Heyst responded, with a readiness that she did not expect. "But it was a weakness on my part. I really didn't want to, only he wouldn't let me off, and I couldn't explain. He was the sort of man to whom you can't explain anything. He was extremely sensitive, and it would have been a tigerish thing to do to mangle his delicate feelings by the sort of plain speaking that

would have been necessary. His mind was like a white-walled, pure chamber, furnished with, say, six straw-bottomed chairs, and he was always placing and displacing them in various combinations. But they were always the same chairs. He was extremely easy to live with; but then he got hold of this coal idea—or, rather, the idea got hold of him. It entered into that scantily furnished chamber of which I have just spoken, and sat on all the chairs. There was no dislodging it, you know! It was going to make his fortune, my fortune, everybody's fortune. In past years, in moments of doubt that will come to a man determined to remain free from absurdities of existence, I often asked myself, with a momentary dread, in what way would life try to get hold of me? And this was the way! He got it into his head that he could do nothing without me. And was I now, he asked me, to spurn and ruin him? Well, one morning—I wonder if he had gone down on his knees to pray that night!—one morning I gave in."

Heyst tugged violently at a tuft of dried grass, and cast it away from him with a nervous gesture.

"I gave in," he repeated.

Looking toward him with a movement of her eyes only, the girl noticed the strong feeling on his face with that intense interest which his person awakened in her mind and in her heart. But it soon passed away, leaving only a moody expression.

"It's difficult to resist where nothing matters," he observed. "And perhaps there is a grain of freakishness in my nature. It amused me to go about uttering silly, commonplace phrases. I was never so well thought of in the islands till I began to jabber commercial gibberish like the veriest idiot. Upon my word, I believe that I was actually respected for a time. I was as grave as an owl over it; I had to be loyal to the man. I have been from first to last, completely, utterly loyal to the best of my ability. I thought he understood something about coal. And if I had been aware that he knew nothing of it, as in fact he didn't, well—I don't know what I could have done to stop him. In one way or another I should

have had to be loyal. Truth, work, ambition, love itself, may be only counters in the lamentable or despicable game of life, but when one takes a hand one must play the game. No, the shade of Morrison needn't haunt me. What's the matter? I say, Lena, why are you staring like that? Do you feel ill?"

Heyst made as if to get on his feet. The girl extended her arm to arrest him, and he remained staring in a sitting posture, propped on one arm, observing her indefinable expression of anxiety, as if she were unable to draw breath.

"What has come to you?" he insisted, feeling strangely unwilling to move, to touch her.

"Nothing." She swallowed painfully. "Of course it can't be. What name did you say? I didn't hear it properly."

"Name?" repeated Heyst dazedly. "I only mentioned Morrison. It's the name of that man of whom I've been speaking. What of it?"

"And you mean to say that he was your friend?"

"You have heard enough to judge for yourself. You know as much of our connection as I know myself. The people in this part of the world went by appearances, and called us friends, as far as I can remember. Appearances—what more, what better can you ask for? In fact you can't have better. You can't have anything else."

"You are trying to confuse me with your talk," she cried. "You can't make fun of this."

"Can't? Well, no, I can't. It's a pity. Perhaps it would have been the best way," said Heyst, in a tone which for him could be called gloomy. "Unless one could forget the silly business altogether." His faint playfulness of manner and speech returned, like a habit one has schooled oneself into, even before his forehead had cleared completely. "But why are you looking so hard at me? Oh, I don't object, and I shall try not to flinch. Your eyes—"

He was looking straight into them, and as a matter of fact had forgotten all about the late Morrison at that moment.

"No," he exclaimed suddenly. "What an impenetrable girl you are, Lena, with those grey eyes of yours! Windows of the soul, as some poet has said. The fellow must have been a glazier by vocation. Well, nature has provided excellently for the shyness of your soul."

When he ceased speaking, the girl came to herself with a catch of her breath. He heard her voice, the varied charm of which he thought he knew so well, saying with an unfamiliar intonation:

"And that partner of yours is dead?"

"Morrison? Oh, yes, as I've told you, he—"

"You never told me."

"Didn't I? I thought I did; or, rather, I thought you must know. It seems impossible that anybody with whom I speak should not know that Morrison is dead."

She lowered her eyelids, and Heyst was startled by something like an expression of horror on her face.

"Morrison!" she whispered in an appalled tone. "Morrison!" Her head drooped. Unable to see her features, Heyst could tell from her voice that for some reason or other she was profoundly moved by the syllables of that unromantic name. A thought flashed through his head—could she have known Morrison? But the mere difference of their origins made it wildly improbable.

"This is very extraordinary!" he said. "Have you ever heard the name before?"

Her head moved quickly several times in tiny affirmative nods, as if she could not trust herself to speak, or even to look at him. She was biting her lower lip.

"Did you ever know anybody of that name?" he asked.

The girl answered by a negative sign; and then at last she spoke, jerkily, as if forcing herself against some doubt or fear. She had heard of that very man, she told Heyst.

"Impossible!" he said positively. "You are mistaken. You couldn't have heard of him. It's—"

He stopped short, with the thought that to talk like this was perfectly useless; that one doesn't argue against thin air.

"But I did hear of him; only I didn't know then, I

couldn't guess, that it was your partner they were talking about."

"Talking about my partner?" repeated Heyst slowly.

"No." Her mind seemed almost as bewildered, as full of incredulity, as his. "No. They were talking of you, really; only I didn't know it."

"Who were they?" Heyst raised his voice. "Who was talking of me? Talking where?"

With the first question he had lifted himself from his reclining position; at the last he was on his knees before her, their heads on a level.

"Why, in that town, in that hotel. Where else could it have been?" she said.

The idea of being talked about was always novel to Heyst's simplified conception of himself. For a moment he was as much surprised as if he had believed himself to be a mere gliding shadow among men. Besides, he had in him a half-unconscious notion that he was above the level of island gossip.

"But you said first that it was of Morrison they talked," he remarked to the girl, sinking on his heels, and no longer much interested. "Strange that you should have the opportunity to hear any talk at all! I was rather under the impression that you never saw anybody belonging to the town except from the platform."

"You forget that I was not living with the other girls," she said. "After meals they used to go back to the Pavilion, but I had to stay in the hotel and do my sewing, or what not, in the room where they talked."

"I didn't think of that. By the by, you never told me who *they* were."

"Why, that horrible red-faced beast," she said, with all the energy of disgust which the mere thought of the hotel-keeper provoked in her.

"Oh, Schomberg!" Heyst murmured carelessly.

"He talked to the boss—to Zangiacomo, I mean. I had to sit there. That devil-woman sometimes wouldn't let me go away. I mean Mrs. Zangiacomo."

"I guessed," murmured Heyst. "She liked to torment you in a variety of ways. But it is really strange that the

hotel-keeper should talk of Morrison to Zangiacomo. As far as I can remember he saw very little of Morrison professionally. He knew many others much better."

The girl shuddered slightly.

"That was the only name I ever overheard. I would get as far away from them as I could, to the other end of the room; but when that beast started shouting, I could not help hearing. I wish I had never heard anything. If I had got up and gone out of the room I don't suppose the woman would have killed me for it; but she would have rowed me in a nasty way. She would have threatened me and called me names. That sort, when they know you are helpless, there's nothing to stop them. I don't know how it is, but bad people, real bad people that you can see are bad, they get over me somehow. It's the way they set about downing one. I am afraid of wickedness."

Heyst watched the changing expressions of her face. He encouraged her, profoundly sympathetic, a little amused.

"I quite understand. You needn't apologise for your great delicacy in the perception of inhuman evil. I am a little like you."

"I am not very plucky," she said.

"Well! I don't know myself what I would do, what countenance I would have before a creature which would strike me as being the evil incarnate. Don't you be ashamed."

She sighed, looked up with her pale, candid gaze and a timid expression of her face, and murmured:

"You don't seem to want to know what he was saying."

"About poor Morrison? It couldn't have been anything bad, for the poor fellow was innocence itself. And then, you know, he is dead, and nothing can possibly matter to him now."

"But I tell you that it was of *you* he was talking!" she cried. "He was saying that Morrison's partner first got all there was to get out of him, and then, and then—well, as good as murdered him—sent him out to die somewhere!"

"You believed that of me?" said Heyst, after a moment of perfect silence.

"I didn't know it had anything to do with you. Schomberg was talking of some Swede. How was I to know? It was only when you began telling me about how you came here—"

"And now you have my version." Heyst forced himself to speak quietly. "So that's how the business looked from outside!" he muttered.

"I remember him saying that everybody in these parts knew the story," the girl added breathlessly.

"Strange that it should hurt me!" mused Heyst to himself; "yet it does. I seem to be as much of a fool as those everybodies who know the story—and no doubt believe it. Can you remember any more?" he addressed the girl in a grimly polite tone. "I've often heard of the moral advantages of seeing oneself as others see one. Let us investigate further. Can't you recall something else that everybody knows?"

"Oh! Don't laugh!" she cried.

"Did I laugh? I assure you I was not aware of it. I won't ask you whether you believe the hotel-keeper's version. Surely you must know the value of human judgment."

She unclasped her hands, moved them slightly, and twined her fingers as before. Protest? Assent? Was there to be nothing more? He was relieved when she spoke in that warm and wonderful voice which in itself comforted and fascinated one's heart, which made her lovable.

"I heard this before you and I ever spoke to each other. It went out of my memory afterwards. Everything went out of my memory then; and I was glad of it. It was a fresh start for me, with you—and you know it. I wish I had forgotten who I was—that would have been best; and I very nearly did forget."

He was moved by the vibrating quality of the last words. She seemed to be talking low of some wonderful enchantment, in mysterious terms of special significance. He thought that if she only could talk to him in some

unknown tongue, she would enslave him altogether by the sheer beauty of the sound, suggesting infinite depths of wisdom and feeling.

"But," she went on, "the name stuck in my head, it seems; and when you mentioned it—"

"It broke the spell," muttered Heyst in angry disappointment, as if he had been deceived in some hope.

The girl, from her position a little above him, surveyed with still eyes the abstracted silence of the man on whom she now depended with a completeness of which she had not been vividly conscious before, because, till then, she had never felt herself swinging between the abysses of earth and heaven in the hollow of his arm. What if he should grow weary of the burden.

"And, moreover, nobody had ever believed that tale!"

Heyst came out with an abrupt burst of sound which made her open her steady eyes wider, with an effect of immense surprise. It was a purely mechanical effect, because she was neither surprised nor puzzled. In fact, she could understand him better then than at any moment since she first set eyes on him.

He laughed scornfully.

"What am I thinking of?" he cried. "As if it could matter to me what anybody had ever said or believed, from the beginning of the world till the crack of doom!"

"I never heard you laugh till to-day," she observed. "This is the second time."

He scrambled to his feet and towered above her.

"That's because, when one's heart has been broken into in the way you have broken into mine, all sorts of weaknesses are free to enter—shame, anger, stupid indignations, stupid fears—stupid laughter, too. I wonder what interpretation you are putting on it?"

"It wasn't gay, certainly," she said. "But why are you angry with me? Are you sorry you took me away from those beasts? I told you who I was. You could see it."

"Heavens!" he muttered. He had regained his command of himself. "I assure you I could see much more than you could tell me. I could see quite a lot that

you don't even suspect yet; but you can't be seen quite through."

He sank to the ground by her side and took her hand. She asked gently:

"What more do you want from me?"

He made no sound for a time.

"The impossible, I suppose," he said very low, as one makes a confidence, and pressing the hand he grasped.

It did not return the pressure. He shook his head as if to drive away the thought of this, and added in a louder, light tone:

"Nothing less. And it isn't because I think little of what I've got already. Oh, no! It is because I think so much of this possession of mine that I can't have it complete enough. I know it's unreasonable. You can't hold back anything—now."

"Indeed I couldn't," she whispered, letting her hand lie passive in his tight grasp. "I only wish I could give you something more, or better, or whatever it is you want."

He was touched by the sincere accent of these simple words.

"I tell you what you can do—you can tell me whether you would have gone with me like this if you had known of whom that abominable idiot of a hotel-keeper was speaking. A murderer—no less!"

"But I didn't know you at all then," she cried. "And I had the sense to understand what he was saying. It wasn't murder, really. I never thought it was."

"What made him invent such an atrocity?" Heyst exclaimed. "He seems a stupid animal. He *is* stupid. How did he manage to hatch that pretty tale? Have I a particularly vile countenance? Is black selfishness written all over my face? Or is that sort of thing so universally human that it might be said of anybody?"

"It wasn't murder," she insisted earnestly.

"I know. I understand. It was worse. As to killing a man, which would be a comparatively decent thing to do, well—I have never done that."

"Why should you do it?" she asked in a frightened voice.

"My dear girl, you don't know the sort of life I have been leading in unexplored countries, in the wilds; it's difficult to give you an idea. There are men who haven't been in such tight places as I have found myself in who have had to—to shed blood, as the saying is. Even the wilds hold prizes which tempt some people; but I had no schemes, no plans—and not even great firmness of mind to make me unduly obstinate. I was simply moving on, while the others, perhaps, were going somewhere. An indifference as to roads and purposes makes one meeker, as it were. And I may say truly, too, that I never did care, I won't say for life—I had scorned what people call by that name from the first—but for being alive. I don't know if that is what men call courage, but I doubt it very much."

"You! You have no courage?" she protested.

"I really don't know. Not the sort that always itches for a weapon, for I have never been anxious to use one in the quarrels that a man gets into in the most innocent way, sometimes. The differences for which men murder each other are, like everything else they do, the most contemptible, the most pitiful things to look back upon. No, I've never killed a man or loved a woman—not even in my thoughts, not even in my dreams."

He raised her hand to his lips, and let them rest on it for a space, during which she moved a little closer to him. After the lingering kiss he did not relinquish his hold.

"To slay, to love—the greatest enterprises of life upon a man! And I have no experience of either. You must forgive me anything that may have appeared to you awkward in my behaviour, inexpressive in my speeches, untimely in my silences."

He moved uneasily, a little disappointed by her attitude, but indulgent to it, and feeling, in this moment of perfect quietness, that in holding her surrendered hand he had found a closer communion than they had ever achieved before. But even then there still lingered in him a sense of incompleteness not altogether overcome—which, it seemed, nothing ever would overcome—the fatal imper-

fection of all the gifts of life, which makes of them a delusion and a snare.

All of a sudden he squeezed her hand angrily. His delicately playful equanimity, the product of kindness and scorn, had perished with the loss of his bitter liberty.

"Not murder, you say! I should think not. But when you led me to talk just now, when the name turned up, when you understood that it was of me that these things had been said, you showed a strange emotion. I could see it."

"I was a bit startled," she said.

"At the baseness of my conduct?" he asked.

"I wouldn't judge you; not for anything."

"Really?"

"It would be as if I dared to judge everything that there is." With her other hand she made a gesture that seemed to embrace in one movement the earth and the heaven. "I wouldn't do such a thing."

Then came a silence, broken at last by Heyst:

"I! I! do a deadly wrong to my poor Morrison!" he cried. "I, who could not bear to hurt his feelings! I, who respected his very madness! Yes, this madness, the wreck of which you can see lying about the jetty of Diamond Bay. What else could I do? He insisted on regarding me as his saviour; he was always restraining the eternal obligation on the tip of his tongue, till I was burning with shame at his gratitude. What could I do? He was going to repay me with this infernal coal, and I had to join him as one joins a child's game in a nursery. One would no more have thought of humiliating him than one would think of humiliating a child. What's the use of talking of all this! Of course, the people here could not understand the truth of our relation to each other. But what business of theirs was it? Kill old Morrison! Well, it is less criminal, less base—I am not saying it is less difficult—to kill a man than to cheat him in that way. You understand that?"

She nodded slightly, but more than once and with evident conviction. His eyes rested on her, inquisitive, ready for tenderness.

"But it was neither one nor the other," he went on.

"Then, why your emotion? All you confess is that you wouldn't judge me."

She turned upon him her veiled, unseeing grey eyes in which nothing of her wonder could be read.

"I said I couldn't," she whispered.

"But you thought that there was no smoke without fire!" The playfulness of tone hardly concealed his irritation. "What power there must be in words, only imperfectly heard—for you did not listen with particular care, did you? What were they? What evil effort of invention drove them into that idiot's mouth out of his lying throat? If you were to try to remember, they would perhaps convince me, too."

"I didn't listen," she protested. "What was it to me what they said of anybody? He was saying that there never were such loving friends to look at as you two; then, when you got all you wanted out of him and got thoroughly tired of him too, you kicked him out to go home and die."

Indignation, with an undercurrent of some other feeling, rang in these quoted words, uttered in her pure and enchanting voice. She ceased abruptly and lowered her long, dark lashes, as if mortally weary, sick at heart.

"Of course, why shouldn't you get tired of that or any other—company? You aren't like any one else, and—and the thought of it made me unhappy suddenly; but indeed, I did not believe anything bad of you. I—"

A brusque movement of his arm, flinging her hand away, stopped her short. Heyst had again lost control of himself. He would have shouted, if shouting had been in his character.

"No, this earth must be the appointed hatching planet of calumny enough to furnish the whole universe! I feel a disgust at my own person, as if I had tumbled into some filthy hole. Pah! And you—all you can say is that you won't judge me; that you—"

She raised her head at this attack, though indeed he had not turned to her.

"I don't believe anything bad of you," she repeated. "I couldn't."

He made a gesture as if to say:

"That's sufficient."

In his soul and in his body he experienced a nervous reaction from tenderness. All at once, without transition, he detested her. But only for a moment. He remembered that she was pretty, and, more, that she had a special grace in the intimacy of life. She had the secret of individuality which excites—and escapes.

He jumped up and began to walk to and fro. Presently his hidden fury fell into dust within him, like a crazy structure, leaving behind emptiness, desolation, regret. His resentment was not against the girl, but against life itself—that commonest of snares, in which he felt himself caught, seeing clearly the plot of plots and unconsoled by the lucidity of his mind.

He swerved and, stepping up to her, sank to the ground by her side. Before she could make a movement, or even turn her head his way, he took her in his arms and kissed her lips. He tasted on them the bitterness of a tear fallen there. He had never seen her cry. It was like another appeal to his tenderness—a new seduction. The girl glanced round, moved suddenly away, and averted her face. With her hand she signed imperiously to him to leave her alone—a command which Heyst did not obey.

V

WHEN she opened her eyes at last and sat up, Heyst scrambled quickly to his feet and went to pick up her cork helmet, which had rolled a little way off. Meanwhile she busied herself in doing up her hair, plaited on the top of her head in two heavy, dark tresses, which had come loose. He tendered her the helmet in silence, and waited as if unwilling to hear the sound of his own voice.

"We had better go down now," he suggested in a low tone.

He extended his hand to help her up. He had the intention to smile, but abandoned it at the nearer sight

of her still face, in which was depicted the infinite lassitude of her soul. On their way to regain the forest path they had to pass through the spot from which the view of the sea could be obtained. The flaming abyss of emptiness, the liquid, undulating glare, the tragic brutality of the light, made her long for the friendly night, with its stars stilled by an austere spell; for the velvety dark sky and the mysterious great shadow of the sea, conveying peace to the day-weary heart. She put her hand to her eyes. Behind her back Heyst spoke gently.

"Let us get on, Lena."

She walked ahead in silence. Heyst remarked that they had never been out before during the hottest hours. It would do her no good, he feared. This solicitude pleased and soothed her. She felt more and more like herself—a poor London girl playing in an orchestra, and snatched out from the humiliations, the squalid dangers of a miserable existence, by a man like whom there was not, there could not be, another in this world. She felt this with elation, with uneasiness, with an intimate pride—and with a peculiar sinking of the heart.

"I am not easily knocked out by any such thing as heat," she said decisively.

"Yes, but I don't forget that you're not a tropical bird."

"You weren't born in these parts, either," she returned.

"No, and perhaps I haven't even your physique. I am a transplanted being. Transplanted! I ought to call myself uprooted—an unnatural state of existence; but a man is supposed to stand anything."

She looked back at him and received a smile. He told her to keep in the shelter of the forest path, which was very still and close, full of heat if free from glare. Now and then they had glimpses of the company's old clearing blazing with light, in which the black stumps of trees stood charred, without shadows, miserable and sinister. They crossed the open in a direct line for the bungalow. On the veranda they fancied they had a glimpse of a vanishing Wang, though the girl was not at all sure that she had seen anything move. Heyst had no doubts.

"Wang has been looking out for us. We are late."

"Was he? I thought I saw something white for a moment, and then I did not see it any more."

"That's it—he vanishes. It's a very remarkable gift in that Chinaman."

"Are they all like that?" she asked with naïve curiosity and uneasiness.

"Not in such perfection," said Heyst, amused.

He noticed with approval that she was not heated by the walk. The drops of perspiration on her forehead were like dew on the cool, white petal of a flower. He looked at her figure of grace and strength, solid and supple, with an ever growing appreciation.

"Go in and rest yourself for a quarter of an hour; and then Mr. Wang will give us something to eat," he said.

They had found the table laid. When they came together again and sat down to it, Wang materialised without a sound, unheard, uncalled, and did his office. Which being accomplished, at a given moment he was not.

A great silence brooded over Samburan—the silence of the great heat that seems pregnant with fatal issues, like the silence of ardent thought. Heyst remained alone in the big room. The girl seeing him take up a book, had retreated to her chamber. Heyst sat down under his father's portrait; and the abominable calumny crept back into his recollection. The taste of it came on his lips, nauseating and corrosive like some kinds of poison. He was tempted to spit on the floor, naïvely, in sheer unsophisticated disgust of the physical sensation. He shook his head, surprised at himself. He was not used to receive his intellectual impressions in that way—reflected in movements of carnal emotion. He stirred impatiently in his chair, and raised the book to his eyes with both hands. It was one of his father's. He opened it haphazard, and his eyes fell on the middle of the page. The elder Heyst had written of everything in many books—of space and of time, of animals and of stars; analysing ideas and actions, the laughter and the frowns of men, and the grimaces of their agony. The son read, shrinking into himself, composing his face as if under the author's

eye, with a vivid consciousness of the portrait on his right hand, a little above his head; a wonderful presence in its heavy frame on the flimsy wall of mats, looking exiled and at home, out of place and masterful, in the painted immobility of profile.

And Heyst, the son, read:

Of the stratagems of life the most cruel is the consolation of love—the most subtle, too; for the desire is the bed of dreams.

He turned the pages of the little volume, "Storm and Dust," glancing here and there at the broken text of reflections, maxims, short phrases, enigmatical sometimes and sometimes eloquent. It seemed to him that he was hearing his father's voice, speaking and ceasing to speak again. Startled at first, he ended by finding a charm in the illusion. He abandoned himself to the half-belief that something of his father dwelt yet on earth—a ghostly voice, audible to the ear of his own flesh and blood. With what strange serenity, mingled with terrors, had that man considered the universal nothingness! He had plunged into it headlong, perhaps to render death, the answer that faced one at every inquiry, more supportable.

Heyst stirred, and the ghostly voice ceased; but his eyes followed the words on the last page of the book:

Men of tormented conscience, or of a criminal imagination, are aware of much that minds of a peaceful, resigned cast do not even suspect. It is not poets alone who dare descend into the abyss of infernal regions, or even who dream of such a descent. The most inexpressive of human beings must have said to himself, at one time or another: "Anything but this!"

. . .

We all have our instants of clairvoyance. They are not very helpful. The character of the scheme does not permit that or anything else to be helpful. Properly speaking its character, judged by the standards established by its victims, is infamous. It excuses every violence of protest and at the same time never fails to crush it, just as it crushes the blindest assent. The so-called wickedness must be, like the so-called virtue, its own reward—to be anything at all. . . .

Clairvoyance or no clairvoyance, men love their captivity. To the unknown force of negation they prefer the miserably

tumbled bed of their servitude. Man alone can give one the disgust of pity; yet I find it easier to believe in the misfortune of mankind than in its wickedness.

These were the last words. Heyst lowered the book to his knees. Lena's voice spoke above his drooping head:

"You sit there as if you were unhappy."

"I thought you were asleep," he said.

"I was lying down, right enough, but I never closed my eyes."

"The rest would have done you good after our walk. Didn't you try?"

"I was lying down, I tell you, but sleep I couldn't."

"And you made no sound? What want of sincerity! Or did you want to be alone for a time?"

"I—alone!" she murmured.

He noticed her eyeing the book, and got up to put it back in the bookcase. When he turned round, he saw that she had dropped into the chair—it was the one she always used—and looked as if her strength had suddenly gone from her, leaving her only her youth, which seemed very pathetic, very much at his mercy. He moved quickly toward the chair.

"Tired, are you! It's my fault, taking you up so high and keeping you out so long. Such a windless day, too!"

She watched his concern, her pose languid, her eyes raised to him, but as unreasonable as ever. He avoided looking into them for that very reason. He forgot himself in the contemplation of those passive arms, of these defenceless lips, and—yes, one had to go back to them—of these wide open eyes. Something wild in their grey stare made him think of sea-birds in the cold murkiness of high latitudes. He started when she spoke, all the charm of physical intimacy revealed suddenly in that voice.

"You should try to love me!" she said.

He had a movement of astonishment.

"Try!" he muttered. "But it seems to me—" He broke off, saying to himself that if he loved her, he had never told her so in so many words. Simple words! They died on his lips. "What makes you say that?" he asked.

She lowered her eyelids and turned her head a little.

"I have done nothing," she said in a low voice. "It's you who have been good, helpful, and tender to me. Perhaps you love me for that—just for that; or perhaps you love me for company, and because—well! But sometimes it seems to me that you can never love me for myself, only for myself, as people do love each other when it is to be for ever." Her head drooped. "For ever," she breathed out again; then, still more faintly, she added an entreating: "Do try!"

These last words went straight to his heart—the sound of them more than the sense. He did not know what to say, either from want of practice in dealing with women, or simply from his innate honesty of thought. All his defences were broken now. Life had him fairly by the throat. But he managed a smile, though she was not looking at him; yes, he did manage it—the well-known Heyst smile of playful courtesy, so familiar to all sorts and conditions of men in the islands.

"My dear Lena," he said, "it looks as if you were trying to pick a very unnecessary quarrel with me—of all people!"

She made no movement. With his elbows spread out, he was twisting the ends of his long moustaches, very masculine and perplexed, enveloped in the atmosphere of femininity as in a cloud, suspecting pitfalls, and as if afraid to move.

"I must admit, though," he added, "that there is no one else; and I suppose a certain amount of quarrelling is necessary for existence in this world."

That girl, seated in her chair in graceful quietude, was to him like a script in an unknown language, or even more simply mysterious: like any writing to the illiterate. As far as women went he was altogether uninstructed and he had not the gift of intuition which is fostered in the days of youth by dreams and visions, exercises of the heart fitting it for the encounters of a world in which love itself rests as much on antagonism as on attraction. His mental attitude was that of a man looking this way and that on a piece of writing which he is unable to decipher,

but which may be big with some revelation. He didn't know what to say. All he found to add was:

"I don't even understand what I have done or left undone to distress you like this."

He stopped, struck afresh by the physical and moral sense of the imperfection of their relations—a sense which made him desire her constant nearness, before his eyes, under his hand, and which, when she was out of sight, made her so vague, so illusive and illusory, a promise that could not be embraced and held.

"No! I don't see clearly what you mean. Is your mind turned towards the future?" he interpellated her with marked playfulness, because he was ashamed to let such a word pass his lips. But all his cherished negations were falling off him one by one.

"Because if it is so there is nothing easier than to dismiss it. In our future, as in what people call the other life, there is nothing to be frightened of."

She raised her eyes to him; and if nature had formed them to express anything else but blank candour he would have learned how terrified she was by his talk and the fact that her sinking heart loved him more desperately than ever. He smiled at her.

"Dismiss all thought of it," he insisted. "Surely you don't suspect after what I have heard from you, that I am anxious to return to mankind. I! I! murder my poor Morrison! It's possible that I may be really capable of that which they say I have done. The point is that I haven't done it. But it is an unpleasant subject to me. I ought to be ashamed to confess it—but it is! Let us forget it. There's that in you, Lena, which can console me for worse things, for uglier passages. And if we forget, there are no voices here to remind us."

She had raised her head before he paused.

"Nothing can break in on us here," he went on and as if there had been an appeal or a provocation in her upward glance, he bent down and took her under the arms, raising her straight out of the chair into a sudden and close embrace. Her alacrity to respond, which made her seem as light as a feather, warmed his heart at that moment more than

closer caresses had done before. He had not expected that ready impulse toward himself which had been dormant in her passive attitude. He had just felt the clasp of her arms round his neck, when, with a slight exclamation—"He's here!"—she disengaged herself and bolted away into her room.

VI

HEYST was astounded. Looking all round, as if to take the whole room to witness of this outrage, he became aware of Wang materialised in the doorway. The intrusion was as surprising as anything could be, in view of the strict regularity with which Wang made himself visible. Heyst was tempted to laugh at first. This practical comment on his affirmation that nothing could break in on them relieved the strain of his feelings. He was a little vexed, too. The Chinaman preserved a profound silence.

"What do you want?" asked Heyst sternly.

"Boat out there," said the Chinaman.

"Where? What do you mean? Boat adrift in the straits?"

Some subtle change in Wang's bearing suggested his being out of breath; but he did not pant, and his voice was steady.

"No—row."

It was Heyst now who was startled and raised his voice.

"Malay man, eh?"

Wang made a slight negative movement with his head.

"Do you hear, Lena?" Heyst called out. "Wang says there is a boat in sight—somewhere near, apparently. Where's that boat, Wang?"

"Round the point," said Wang, leaping into Malay unexpectedly, and in a loud voice. "White men—three."

"So close as that?" exclaimed Heyst, moving out on the veranda followed by Wang. "White men? Impossible!"

Over the clearing shadows were already lengthening. The sun hung low; a ruddy glare lay on the burnt black patch in front of the bungalow, and slanted on the ground between the straight, tall, mast-like trees soaring a hundred feet or more without a branch. The growth of bushes cut off all view of the jetty from the veranda. Far away to the right Wang's hut, or rather its dark roof of mats, could be seen above the bamboo fence which insured the privacy of the Alfuro woman. The Chinaman looked that way swiftly. Heyst paused, and then stepped back a pace into the room.

"White men, Lena, apparently. What are you doing?"

"I am just bathing my eyes a little," the girl's voice said from the inner room.

"Oh, yes; all right!"

"Do you want me?"

"No. You had better—I am going down to the jetty. Yes, you had better stay in. What an extraordinary thing!"

It was so extraordinary that nobody could possibly appreciate how extraordinary it was but himself. His mind was full of mere exclamations, while his feet were carrying him in the direction of the jetty. He followed the line of the rails, escorted by Wang.

"Where were you when you first saw the boat?" he asked over his shoulder.

Wang explained in Malay that he had gone to the shore end of the wharf, to get a few lumps of coal from the big heap, when, happening to raise his eyes from the ground, he saw the boat—a white man boat, not a canoe. He had good eyes. He had seen the boat, with the men at the oars; and here Wang made a particular gesture over his eyes, as if his vision had received a blow. He had turned at once and run to the house to report.

"No mistake, eh?" said Heyst, moving on. At the very outer edge of the belt he stopped short. Wang halted behind him on the path, till the voice of Number One called him sharply forward into the open. He obeyed.

"Where's that boat?" asked Heyst forcibly. "I say—where is it?"

Nothing whatever was to be seen between the point and the jetty. The stretch of Diamond Bay was like a piece of purple shadow, lustrous and empty, while beyond the land, the open sea lay blue and opaque under the sun. Heyst's eyes swept all over the offing till they met, far off, the dark cone of the volcano, with its faint plume of smoke broadening and vanishing everlastingly at the top, without altering its shape in the glowing transparency of the evening.

"The fellow has been dreaming," he muttered to himself.

He looked hard at the Chinaman. Wang seemed turned into stone. Suddenly, as if he had received a shock, he started, flung his arm out with a pointing forefinger, and made guttural noises to the effect that there, there, there, he had seen a boat.

It was very uncanny. Heyst thought of some strange hallucination. Unlikely enough; but that a boat with three men in it should have sunk between the point and the jetty, suddenly, like a stone, without leaving as much on the surface as a floating oar, was still more unlikely. The theory of a phantom boat would have been more credible than that.

"Confound it!" he muttered to himself.

He was unpleasantly affected by this mystery; but now a simple explanation occurred to him. He stepped hastily out on the wharf. The boat, if it had existed and had retreated, could perhaps be seen from the far end of the long jetty.

Nothing was to be seen. Heyst let his eyes roam idly over the sea. He was so absorbed in his perplexity that a hollow sound, as of somebody tumbling about in a boat, with a clatter of oars and spars, failed to make him move for a moment. When his mind seized its meaning, he had no difficulty in locating the sound. It had come from below—from under the jetty!

He ran back for a dozen yards or so, and then looked over. His sight plunged straight into the stern-sheets of a big boat, the greater part of which was hidden from him by the planking of the jetty. His eyes fell on the thin back of a man doubled up over the tiller in a queer,

uncomfortable attitude of drooping sorrow. Another man, more directly below Heyst, sprawled on his back from gunwale to gunwale, half off the after thwart, his head lower than his feet. This second man glared wildly upward, and struggled to raise himself, but to all appearance was much too drunk to succeed. The visible part of the boat contained also a flat, leather trunk, on which the first man's long legs were tucked up nervously. A large earthenware jar, with its wide mouth uncorked, rolled out on the bottom-boards from under the sprawling man.

Heyst had never been so much astonished in his life. He stared dumbly at the strange boat's crew. From the first he was positive that these men were not sailors. They wore the white drill suit of tropical civilisation; but their apparition in a boat Heyst could not connect with anything plausible. The civilisation of the tropics could have had nothing to do with it. It was more like those myths, current in Polynesia, of amazing strangers, who arrive at an island, gods or demons, bringing good or evil to the innocence of the inhabitants—gifts of unknown things, words never heard before.

Heyst noticed a cork helmet floating alongside the boat, evidently fallen from the head of the man doubled over the tiller, who displayed a dark, bony poll. An oar, too, had been knocked overboard, probably by the sprawling man, who was still struggling between the thwarts. By this time Heyst regarded the visitation no longer with surprise, but with the sustained attention demanded by a difficult problem. With one foot posed on the string-piece, and leaning on his raised knee, he was taking in everything. The sprawling man rolled off the thwart, collapsed, and, most unexpectedly, got on his feet. He swayed dizzily, spreading his arms out, and uttered faintly a hoarse, dreamy, "Hallo!" His upturned face was swollen, red, peeling all over the nose and cheeks. His stare was irrational. Heyst perceived stains of dried blood all over the front of his dirty white coat, and also on one sleeve.

"What's the matter? Are you wounded?"

The other glanced down, reeled—one of his feet was

inside a large pith hat—and, recovering himself, let out a dismal, grating sound in the manner of a grim laugh.

"Blood—not mine. Thirst's the matter. Exhausted's the matter. Done up. Drink, man! Give us water!"

Thirst was in the very tone of his words, alternating a broken croak and a faint, throaty rustle which just reached Heyst's ears. The man in the boat raised his hands to be helped up on the jetty, whispering:

"I tried. I am too weak. I tumbled down."

Wang was coming along the jetty slowly, with intent, straining eyes.

"Run back and bring a crowbar here. There's one lying by the coal-heap," Heyst shouted to him.

The man standing in the boat sat down on the thwart behind him. A horrible coughing laugh came through his swollen lips.

"Crowbar? What's that for?" he mumbled, and his head dropped on his chest mournfully.

Meantime Heyst, as if he had forgotten the boat, started kicking hard at a large brass tap projecting above the planks. To accommodate ships that came for coal and happened to need water as well, a stream had been tapped in the interior and an iron pipe led along the jetty. It terminated with a curved end almost exactly where the strangers' boat had been driven between the piles; but the tap was set fast.

"Hurry up!" Heyst yelled to the Chinaman, who was running with the crowbar in his hand.

Heyst snatched it from him, and, obtaining a leverage against the string-piece, wrung the stiff tap round with a mighty jerk.

"I hope that pipe hasn't got choked!" he muttered to himself anxiously.

It hadn't; but it did not yield a strong gush. The sound of a thin stream, partly breaking on the gunwale of the boat and partly splashing alongside, became at once audible. It was greeted by a cry of inarticulate and savage joy. Heyst knelt on the string-piece and peered down. The man who had spoken was already holding his open mouth under the bright trickle. Water ran over

his eyelids and over his nose, gurgled down his throat, flowed over his chin. Then some obstruction in the pipe gave way, and a sudden thick jet broke on his face. In a moment his shoulders were soaked, the front of his coat inundated; he streamed and dripped; water ran into his pockets, down his legs, into his shoes; but he had clutched the end of the pipe, and, hanging on with both hands, swallowed, spluttered, choked, snorted with the noises of a swimmer. Suddenly a curious dull roar reached Heyst's ears. Something hairy and black flew from under the jetty. A dishevelled head, coming on like a cannon-ball, took the man at the pipe in flank, with enough force to tear his grip loose and fling him headlong into the stern-sheets. He fell upon the folded legs of the man at the tiller, who, roused by the commotion in the boat, was sitting up, silent, rigid, and very much like a corpse. His eyes were but two black patches, and his teeth glistened with a death's head grin between his retracted lips, no thicker than blackish parchment glued over the gums.

From him Heyst's eyes wandered to the creature who had replaced the first man at the end of the water-pipe. Enormous brown paws clutched it savagely; the wild, big head hung back, and in a face covered with a wet mass of hair there gaped crookedly a wide mouth full of fangs. The water filled it, welled up in hoarse coughs, ran down on each side of the jaws and down the hairy throat, soaked the black pelt of the enormous chest, naked under a torn check shirt, heaving convulsively with a play of massive muscles carved in red mahogany.

As soon as the second man had recovered the breath knocked out of him by the irresistible charge, a scream of mad cursing issued from the stern-sheets. With a rigid, angular crooking of the elbow, the man at the tiller put his hand back to his hip.

"Don't shoot him, sir!" yelled the second man. "Wait! Let me have that tiller. I will teach him to shove himself in front of a *caballero*!"

Martin Ricardo flourished the heavy piece of wood, leaped forward with astonishing vigour, and brought it down on Pedro's head with a crash that resounded all

over the quiet sweep of Black Diamond Bay. A crimson patch appeared on the matted hair; red veins appeared in the water flowing all over his face, and it dripped in rosy drops off his head. But the man hung on. Not till a second furious blow descended did the hairy paws let go their grip and the squirming body sink limply. Before it could touch the bottom-boards, a tremendous kick in the ribs from Ricardo's foot shifted it forward out of sight, whence came the noise of a heavy thud, a clatter of spars, and a pitiful grunt. Ricardo stooped to look under the jetty.

"Aha, dog! This will teach you to keep back where you belong, you murdering brute, you slaughtering savage, you! You infidel, you robber of churches! Next time I will rip you open from neck to heel, you carrion-eater! *Esclavo!*"

He backed a little and straightened himself up.

"I don't mean it really," he remarked to Heyst, whose steady eyes met his from above. He ran aft briskly.

"Come along, sir. It's your turn. I oughtn't to have drunk first. 'S truth, I forgot myself! A gentleman like you will overlook that, I know." As he made these apologies, Ricardo extended his hand. "Let me steady you, sir."

Slowly Mr. Jones unfolded himself in all his slenderness, rocked, staggered, and caught Ricardo's shoulder. His henchman assisted him to the pipe, which went on gushing a clear stream of water, sparkling exceedingly against the black piles and the gloom under the jetty.

"Catch hold, sir," Ricardo advised solicitously. "All right?"

He stepped back, and, while Mr. Jones revelled in the abundance of water, he addressed himself to Heyst with a sort of justificatory speech, the tone of which, reflecting his feelings, partook of purring and spitting. They had been thirty hours tugging at the oars, he explained, and they had been more than forty hours without water, except that the night before they had licked the dew off the gunwales.

Ricardo did not explain to Heyst how it happened. At that precise moment he had no explanation ready for the man on the wharf, who, he guessed, must be wondering much more at the presence of his visitors than at their plight.

VII

THE explanation lay in the two simple facts that the light winds and strong currents of the Java Sea had drifted the boat about until they partly lost their bearings; and that by some extraordinary mistake one of the two jars put into the boat by Schomberg's man contained salt water. Ricardo tried to put some pathos into his tones. Pulling for thirty hours with eighteen-foot oars! And the sun! Ricardo relieved his feelings by cursing the sun. They had felt their hearts and lungs shrivel within them. And then, as if all that hadn't been trouble enough, he complained bitterly, he had had to waste his fainting strength in beating their servant about the head with a stretcher. The fool had wanted to drink sea water, and wouldn't listen to reason. There was no stopping him otherwise. It was better to beat him into insensibility than to have him go crazy in the boat, and to be obliged to shoot him. The preventive, administered with enough force to brain an elephant, boasted Ricardo, had to be applied on two occasions—the second time all but in sight of the jetty.

"You have seen the beauty," Ricardo went on expansively, hiding his lack of some sort of probable story under this loquacity. "I had to hammer him away from the spout. Opened afresh all the old broken spots on his head. You saw how hard I had to hit. He has no restraint, no restraint at all. If it wasn't that he can be made useful in one way or another, I would just as soon have let the governor shoot him."

He smiled up at Heyst in his peculiar lip-retracting manner, and added by way of afterthought:

"That's what will happen to him in the end, if he

doesn't learn to restrain himself. But I've taught him to mind his manners for a while, anyhow!"

And again he addressed his quick grin up to the man on the wharf. His round eyes had never left Heyst's face ever since he began to deliver his account of the voyage.

"So that's how he looks!" Ricardo was saying to himself.

He had not expected Heyst to be like this. He had formed for himself a conception containing the helpful suggestion of a vulnerable point. These solitary men were often tipplers. But no—this was not a drinking man's face; nor could he detect the weakness of alarm, or even the weakness of surprise, on these features, in these steady eyes.

"We were too far gone to climb out," Ricardo went on. "I heard you walking along, though. I thought I shouted; I tried to. You didn't hear me shout?"

Heyst made an almost imperceptible negative sign, which the greedy eyes of Ricardo—greedy for all signs—did not miss.

"Throat too parched. We didn't even care to whisper to each other lately. Thirst chokes one. We might have died there under this wharf before you found us."

"I couldn't think where you had gone to." Heyst was heard at last, addressing directly the newcomers from the sea. "You were seen as soon as you cleared that point."

"We were seen, eh?" grunted Mr. Ricardo. "We pulled like machines—daren't stop. The governor sat at the tiller, but he couldn't speak to us. She drove in between the piles till she hit something, and we all tumbled off the thwarts as if we had been drunk. Drunk—ha, ha! Too dry, by George! We fetched in here with the very last of our strength, and no mistake. Another mile would have done for us. When I heard your footsteps above, I tried to get up, and I fell down."

"That was the first sound I heard," said Heyst.

Mr. Jones, the front of his soiled white tunic soaked and plastered against his breast-bone, staggered away from the water-pipe. Steadying himself on Ricardo's

shoulder, he drew a long breath, raised his dripping head, and produced a smile of ghastly amiability, which was lost upon the thoughtful Heyst. Behind his back the sun, touching the water, was like a disc of iron cooled to a dull red glow, ready to start rolling round the circular steel plate of the sea, which, under the darkening sky, looked more solid than the high ridge of Samburan; more solid than the point, whose long outlined slope melted into its own unfathomable shadow blurring the dim sheen on the bay. The forceful stream from the pipe broke like shattered glass on the boat's gunwale. Its loud, fitful, and persistent splashing revealed the depth of the world's silence.

"Great notion to lead the water out here," pronounced Ricardo appreciatively.

Water was life. He felt now as if he could run a mile, scale a ten-foot wall, sing a song. Only a few minutes ago he was next door to a corpse, done up, unable to stand, to lift a hand; unable to groan. A drop of water had done that miracle.

"Didn't you feel life itself running and soaking into you, sir?" he asked his principal, with deferential but forced vivacity.

Without a word, Mr. Jones stepped off the thwart and sat down in the stern-sheets.

"Isn't that man of yours bleeding to death in the bows under there?" inquired Heyst.

Ricardo ceased his ecstasies over the life-giving water and answered in a tone of innocence:

"He? You may call him a man, but his hide is a jolly sight tougher than the toughest alligator he ever skinned in the good old days. You don't know how much he can stand; I do. We have tried him long time ago. *Olà*, there! Pedro! Pedro!" he yelled, with a force of lung testifying to the regenerative virtues of water.

A weak "*Señor?*" answered from under the wharf.

"What did I tell you?" said Ricardo triumphantly. "Nothing can hurt him. He's all right. But, I say, the boat's getting swamped. Can't you turn this water off before you sink her under us? She's half full already."

At a sign from Heyst, Wang hammered at the brass tap

on the wharf, then stood behind Number One, crowbar in hand, motionless as before. Ricardo was perhaps not so certain of Pedro's toughness as he affirmed; for he stooped, peering under the wharf, then moved forward out of sight. The gush of water, ceasing suddenly, made a silence which became complete when the after-trickle stopped. Afar, the sun was reduced to a red spark, glowing very low in the breathless immensity of twilight. Purple gleams lingered on the water all round the boat. The spectral figure in the stern-sheets spoke in a languid tone:

"That—er—companion—er—secretary of mine is a queer chap. I am afraid we aren't presenting ourselves in a very favourable light."

Heyst listened. It was the conventional voice of an educated man, only strangely lifeless. But more strange yet was this concern for appearances, expressed, he did not know, whether in jest or in earnest. Earnestness was hardly to be supposed under the circumstances, and no one had ever jested in such dead tones. It was something which could not be answered, and Heyst said nothing. The other went on:

"Travelling as I do, I find a man of his sort extremely useful. He has his little weaknesses, no doubt."

"Indeed!" Heyst was provoked into speaking. "Weakness of the arm is not one of them; neither is an exaggerated humanity, as far as I can judge."

"Defects of temper," explained Mr. Jones from the stern-sheets.

The subject of this dialogue, coming out just then from under the wharf into the visible part of the boat, made himself heard in his own defence, in a voice full of life, and with nothing languid in the manner. On the contrary, it was brisk, almost jocose. He begged pardon for contradicting. He was never out of temper with "our Pedro." The fellow was a Dago of immense strength and of no sense whatever. This combination made him dangerous, and he had to be treated accordingly, in a manner which he could understand. Reasoning was beyond him.

"And so"—Ricardo addressed Heyst with animation—"you mustn't be surprised if—"

"I assure you," Heyst interrupted, "that my wonder at your arrival in your boat here is so great that it leaves no room for minor astonishments. But hadn't you better land?"

"That's the talk, sir!" Ricardo began to bustle about the boat, talking all the time. Finding himself unable to "size up" this man, he was inclined to credit him with extraordinary powers of penetration, which, it seemed to him, would be favoured by silence. Also, he feared some pointblank question. He had no ready-made story to tell. He and his patron had put off considering that rather important detail too long. For the last two days, the horrors of thirst, coming on them unexpectedly, had prevented consultation. They had had to pull for dear life. But the man on the wharf, were he in league with the devil himself, would pay for all their sufferings, thought Ricardo with an unholy joy.

Meantime, splashing in the water which covered the bottom-boards, Ricardo congratulated himself aloud on the luggage being out of the way of the wet. He had piled it up forward. He had roughly tied up Pedro's head. Pedro had nothing to grumble about. On the contrary, he ought to be mighty thankful to him, Ricardo, for being alive at all.

"Well, now, let me give you a leg up, sir," he said cheerily to his motionless principal in the stern-sheets. "All our troubles are over—for a time, anyhow. Ain't it luck to find a white man on this island? I would have just as soon expected to meet an angel from heaven—eh, Mr. Jones? Now then—ready, sir? One, two, three, up you go!"

Helped from below by Ricardo, and from above by the man more unexpected than an angel, Mr. Jones scrambled up and stood on the wharf by the side of Heyst. He swayed like a reed. The night descending on Samburan turned into dense shadow the point of land and the wharf itself, and gave a dark solidity to the unshimmering water extending to the last faint trace of light away to the west. Heyst stared at the guests whom the renounced world had sent him thus at the end of the day. The only other

vestige of light left on earth lurked in the hollows of the thin man's eyes. They gleamed, mobile and languidly evasive. The eyelids fluttered.

"You are feeling weak," said Heyst.

"For the moment, a little," confessed the other.

With loud panting, Ricardo scrambled on his hands and knees upon the wharf, energetic and unaided. He rose up at Heyst's elbow and stamped his foot on the planks, with a sharp, provocative, double beat, such as is heard sometimes in fencing-schools before the adversaries engage their foils. Not that the renegade seaman Ricardo knew anything of fencing. What he called "shooting-irons" were his weapons, or the still less aristocratic knife, such as was even then ingeniously strapped to his leg. He thought of it, at that moment. A swift stooping motion, then, on the recovery, a ripping blow, a shove off the wharf, and no noise except a splash in the water that would scarcely disturb the silence. Heyst would have no time for a cry. It would be quick and neat, and immensely in accord with Ricardo's humour. But he repressed this gust of savagery. The job was not such a simple one. This piece had to be played to another tune, and in much slower time. He returned to his note of talkative simplicity.

"Ay; and I too don't feel as strong as I thought I was when the first drink set me up. Great wonder-worker water is! And to get it right here on the spot! It was heaven—hey, sir?"

Mr. Jones, being directly addressed, took up his part in the concerted piece:

"Really, when I saw a wharf on what might have been an uninhabited island, I couldn't believe my eyes. I doubted its existence. I thought it was a delusion, till the boat actually drove between the piles, as you see her lying now."

While he was speaking faintly, in a voice which did not seem to belong to the earth, his henchman, in extremely loud and terrestrial accents, was fussing about their belongings in the boat, addressing himself to Pedro:

"Come, now—pass up the dunnage there! Move

yourself, *hombre,* or I'll have to get down again and give you a tap on those bandages of yours, you growling bear, you!"

"Ah! You didn't believe in the reality of the wharf?" Heyst was saying to Mr. Jones.

"You ought to kiss my hands!"

Ricardo caught hold of an ancient Gladstone bag and swung it on the wharf with a thump.

"Yes! You ought to burn a candle before me as they do before the saints in your country. No saint has ever done so much for you as I have, you ungrateful vagabond. Now then! Up you get."

Helped by the talkative Ricardo, Pedro scrambled up on the wharf, where he remained for some time on all fours, swinging to and fro his shaggy head tied up in white rags. Then he got up clumsily, like a bulky animal in the dusk, balancing itself on its hind legs.

Mr. Jones began to explain languidly to Heyst that they were in a pretty bad state that morning, when they caught sight of the smoke of the volcano. It nerved them to make an effort for their lives. Soon afterward they made out the island.

"I had just wits enough left in my baked brain to alter the direction of the boat," the ghostly voice went on. "As to finding assistance, a wharf, a white man—nobody would have dreamed of it. Simply preposterous!"

"That's what I thought when my Chinaman came and told me he had seen a boat with white men pulling up," said Heyst.

"Most extraordinary luck," interjected Ricardo, standing by anxiously attentive to every word. "Seems a dream," he added. "A lovely dream!"

A silence fell on that group of three, as if every one had become afraid to speak, in an obscure sense of an impending crisis. Pedro on one side of them and Wang on the other had the air of watchful spectators. A few stars had come out pursuing the ebbing twilight. A light draught of air, tepid enough in the thickening twilight after the scorching day, struck a chill into Mr. Jones in his soaked clothes.

"I may infer, then, that there is a settlement of white people here?" he murmured, shivering visibly.

Heyst roused himself.

"Oh, abandoned, abandoned. I am alone here—practically alone; but several empty houses are still standing. No lack of accommodation. We may just as well—here, Wang, go back to the shore and run the trolley out here."

The last words having been spoken in Malay, he explained courteously that he had given directions for the transport of the luggage. Wang had melted into the night in his soundless manner.

"My word! Rails laid down and all," exclaimed Ricardo softly, in a tone of admiration. "Well, I never!"

"We were working a coal-mine here," said the late manager of the Tropical Belt Coal Company. "These are only the ghosts of things that have been."

Mr. Jones's teeth were suddenly started chattering by another faint puff of wind, a mere sigh from the west, where Venus cast her rays on the dark edge of the horizon, like a bright lamp hung above the grave of the sun.

"We might be moving on," proposed Heyst. "The Chinaman and that—ah—ungrateful servant of yours, with the broken head, can load the things and come along after us."

The suggestion was accepted without words. Moving toward the shore, the three men met the trolley, a mere metallic rustle which whisked past them, the shadowy Wang running noiselessly behind. Only the sound of their footsteps accompanied them. It was a long time since so many footsteps had rung together on that jetty. Before they stepped on to the path trodden through the grass, Heyst said:

"I am prevented from offering you a share of my own quarters." The distant courtliness of this beginning arrested the other two suddenly, as if amazed by some manifest incongruity. "I should regret it more," he went on, "if I were not in a position to give you the choice of those empty bungalows for a temporary home."

He turned round and plunged into the narrow track, the two others following in single file.

"Queer start!" Ricardo took the opportunity for whispering, as he fell behind Mr. Jones, who swayed in the gloom, enclosed by the stalks of tropical grass, almost as slender as a stalk of grass himself.

In this order they emerged into the open space kept clear of vegetation by Wang's judicious system of periodical firing. The shapes of buildings, unlighted, high-roofed, looked mysteriously extensive and featureless against the increasing glitter of the stars. Heyst was pleased at the absence of light in his bungalow. It looked as uninhabited as the others. He continued to lead the way, inclining to the right. His equable voice was heard:

"This one would be the best. It was our counting-house. There is some furniture in it yet. I am pretty certain that you'll find a couple of camp bedsteads in one of the rooms."

The high-pitched roof of the bungalow towered up very close, eclipsing the sky.

"Here we are. Three steps. As you see, there's a wide veranda. Sorry to keep you waiting for a moment; the door is locked, I think."

He was heard trying it. Then he leaned against the rail, saying:

"Wang will get the keys."

The others waited, two vague shapes nearly mingled together in the darkness of the veranda, from which issued a sudden chattering of Mr. Jones's teeth, directly suppressed, and a slight shuffle of Ricardo's feet. Their guide and host, his back against the rail, seemed to have forgotten their existence. Suddenly he moved, and murmured:

"Ah, here's the trolley."

Then he raised his voice in Malay, and was answered, "*Ya tuan*," from an indistinct group that could be made out in the direction of the track.

"I have sent Wang for the key and a light," he said, in a voice that came out without any particular direction—a peculiarity which disconcerted Ricardo.

Wang did not tarry long on his mission. Very soon from the distant recesses of obscurity appeared the swinging lantern he carried. It cast a fugitive ray on the arrested trolley with the uncouth figure of the wild Pedro drooping over the load ; then it moved toward the bungalow and ascended the stairs. After working at the stiff lock, Wang applied his shoulder to the door. It came open with explosive suddenness, as if in a passion at being thus disturbed after two years' repose. From the dark slope of a tall stand-up writing-desk a forgotten, solitary sheet of paper flew up and settled gracefully on the floor.

Wang and Pedro came and went through the offended door, bringing the things off the trolley, one flitting swiftly in and out, the other staggering heavily. Later, directed by a few quiet words from Number One, Wang made several journeys with the lantern to the store-rooms, bringing in blankets, provisions in tins, coffee, sugar, and a packet of candles. He lighted one, and stuck it on the ledge of the stand-up desk. Meantime Pedro, being introduced to some kindling wood and a bundle of dry sticks, had busied himself outside in lighting a fire, on which he placed a ready filled kettle handed to him by Wang impassively, at arm's length, as if across a chasm. Having received the thanks of his guests, Heyst wished them good night and withdrew, leaving them to their repose.

VIII

HEYST walked away slowly. There was still no light in his bungalow, and he thought that perhaps it was just as well. By this time he was much less perturbed. Wang had preceded him with the lantern, as if in a hurry to get away from the two white men and their hairy attendant. The light was not dancing along any more ; it was standing perfectly still by the steps of the veranda.

Heyst glancing back casually, saw behind him still another light,—the light of the strangers' open fire. A

black, uncouth form, stooping over it monstrously, staggered away into the outlying shadows. The kettle had boiled, probably.

With that weird vision of something questionably human impressed upon his senses, Heyst moved on a pace or two. What could the people be who had such a creature for their familiar attendant? He stopped. The vague apprehension of a distant future, in which he saw Lena unavoidably separated from him by profound and subtle differences; the sceptical carelessness which had accompanied every one of his attempts at action, like a secret reserve of his soul, fell away from him. He no longer belonged to himself. There was a call far more imperious and august. He came up to the bungalow, and, at the very limit of the lantern's light, on the top step, he saw her feet and the bottom part of her dress. The rest of her person was suggested dimly as high as her waist. She sat on a chair, and the gloom of the low eaves descended upon her head and shoulders. She didn't stir.

"You haven't gone to sleep here?" he asked.

"Oh, no! I was waiting for you—in the dark."

Heyst, on the top step, leaned against a wooden pillar, after moving the lantern to one side.

"I have been thinking that it is just as well you had no light. But wasn't it dull for you to sit in the dark?"

"I don't need a light to think of you." Her charming voice gave a value to this banal answer, which had also the merit of truth. Heyst laughed a little, and said that he had had a curious experience. She made no remark. He tried to figure to himself the outlines of her easy pose. A spot of dim light here and there hinted at the unfailing grace of attitude which was one of her natural possessions.

She had thought of him, but not in connection with the strangers. She had admired him from the first; she had been attracted by his warm voice, his gentle eye, but she had felt him too wonderfully difficult to know. He had given to life a savour, a movement, a promise mingled with menaces, which she had not suspected were to be found in it—or, at any rate, not by a girl wedded to misery as she was. She said to herself that she must not be irritated

because he seemed too self-contained, and as if shut up in a world of his own. When he took her in his arms, she felt that his embrace had a great and compelling force, that he was moved deeply, and that perhaps he would not get tired of her so very soon. She thought that he had opened to her the feelings of delicate joy, that the very uneasiness he caused her was delicious in its sadness, and that she would try to hold him as long as she could—till her fainting arms, her sinking soul, could cling to him no more.

"Wang's not here, of course?" Heyst said suddenly.

She answered as if in her sleep.

"He put this light down here without stopping and ran."

"Ran, did he? H'm! Well, it's considerably later than his usual time to go home to his Alfuro wife; but to be seen running is a sort of degradation for Wang, who has mastered the art of vanishing. Do you think he was startled out of his perfection by something?"

"Why should he be startled?"

Her voice remained dreamy, a little uncertain.

"I have been startled," Heyst said.

She was not listening to him. The lantern at their feet threw the shadows of her face upward. Her eyes glistened, as if frightened and attentive, above a lighted chin and a very white throat.

"Upon my word," mused Heyst, "now that I don't see them, I can hardly believe that those fellows exist!"

"And what about me?" she asked, so swiftly that he made a movement like somebody pounced upon from an ambush. "When you don't see me, do you believe that I exist?"

"Exist? Most charmingly! My dear Lena, you don't know your own advantages. Why, your voice alone would be enough to make you unforgettable!"

"Oh, I didn't mean forgetting in that way. I dare say if I were to die you would remember me right enough. And what good would that be to anybody? It's while I am alive that I want—"

Heyst stood by her chair, a stalwart figure imperfectly

lighted. The broad shoulders, the martial face that was like a disguise of his disarmed soul, were lost in the gloom above the plane of light in which his feet were planted. He suffered from a trouble with which she had nothing to do. She had no general conception of the conditions of the existence he had offered to her. Drawn into its peculiar stagnation she remained unrelated to it because of her ignorance.

For instance, she could never perceive the prodigious improbability of the arrival of that boat. She did not seem to be thinking of it. Perhaps she had already forgotten the fact herself. And Heyst resolved suddenly to say nothing more of it. It was not that he shrank from alarming her. Not feeling anything definite himself he could not imagine a precise effect being produced on her by any amount of explanation. There is a quality in events which is apprehended differently by different minds or even by the same mind at different times. Any man living at all consciously knows that embarrassing truth. Heyst was aware that this visit could bode nothing pleasant. In his present soured temper towards all mankind he looked upon it as a visitation of a particularly offensive kind.

He glanced along the veranda in the direction of the other bungalow. The fire of sticks in front of it had gone out. No faint glow of embers, not the slightest thread of light in that direction, hinted at the presence of strangers. The darker shapes in the obscurity, the dead silence, betrayed nothing of that strange intrusion. The peace of Samburan asserted itself as on any other night. Everything was as before, except—Heyst became aware of it suddenly—that for a whole minute, perhaps, with his hand on the back of the girl's chair and within a foot of her person, he had lost the sense of her existence, for the first time since he had brought her over to share this invincible, this undefiled peace. He picked up the lantern, and the act made a silent stir all along the veranda. A spoke of shadow swung swiftly across her face, and the strong light rested on the immobility of her features, as of a woman looking at a vision. Her eyes were still, her lips serious.

Her dress, open at the neck, stirred slightly to her even breathing.

"We had better go in, Lena," suggested Heyst, very low, as if breaking a spell cautiously.

She rose without a word. Heyst followed her indoors. As they passed through the living-room, he left the lantern burning on the centre table.

IX

THAT night the girl woke up, for the first time in her new experience, with the sensation of having been abandoned to her own devices. She woke up from a painful dream of separation brought about in a way which she could not understand, and missed the relief of the waking instant. The desolate feeling of being alone persisted. She was really alone. A night-light made it plain enough in the dim, mysterious manner of a dream; but this was reality. It startled her exceedingly.

In a moment she was at the curtain that hung in the doorway, and raised it with a steady hand. The conditions of their life in Samburan would have made peeping absurd; nor was such a thing in her character. This was not a movement of curiosity, but of downright alarm —the continued distress and fear of the dream. The night could not have been very far advanced. The light in the lantern was burning strongly, striping the floor and walls of the room with thick black bands. She hardly knew whether she expected to see Heyst or not; but she saw him at once, standing by the table in his sleeping-suit, his back to the doorway. She stepped in noiselessly with her bare feet, and let the curtain fall behind her. Something characteristic in Heyst's attitude made her say, almost in a whisper:

"You are looking for something."

He could not have heard her before; but he didn't start at the unexpected whisper. He only pushed the drawer of the table in and, without even looking over

his shoulder, asked quietly, accepting her presence as if he had been aware of all her movements:

"I say, are you certain that Wang didn't go through this room this evening?"

"Wang? When?"

"After leaving the lantern, I mean."

"Oh, no. He ran on. I watched him."

"Or before, perhaps—while I was with these boat people? Do you know? Can you tell?"

"I hardly think so. I came out as the sun went down, and sat outside till you came back to me."

"He could have popped in for an instant through the back veranda."

"I heard nothing in here," she said. "What is the matter?"

"Naturally you wouldn't hear. He can be as quiet as a shadow, when he likes. I believe he could steal the pillows from under our heads. He might have been here ten minutes ago."

"What woke you up? Was it a noise?"

"Can't say that. Generally one can't tell; but is it likely, Lena? You are, I believe, the lighter sleeper of us two. A noise loud enough to wake me up would have awakened you, too. I tried to be as quiet as I could. What roused you?"

"I don't know—a dream, perhaps. I woke up crying."

"What was the dream?"

Heyst, with one hand resting on the table, had turned in her direction, his round, uncovered head set on a fighter's muscular neck. She left his question unanswered, as if she had not heard it.

"What is it you have missed?" she asked in her turn, very grave.

Her dark hair, drawn smoothly back, was done in two thick tresses for the night. Heyst noticed the good form of her brow, the dignity of its width, its unshining whiteness. It was a sculptural forehead. He had a moment of acute appreciation intruding upon another order of thoughts. It was as if there could be no end of his discoveries about that girl, at the most incongruous moments.

She had on nothing but a hand-woven cotton sarong —one of Heyst's few purchases, years ago, in Celebes, where they are made. He had forgotten all about it till she came, and then had found it at the bottom of an old sandalwood trunk dating back to pre-Morrison days. She had quickly learned to wind it up under her armpits with a safe twist, as Malay village girls do when going down to bathe in a river. Her shoulders and arms were bare; one of her tresses, hanging forward, looked almost black against the white skin. As she was taller than the average Malay woman, the sarong ended a good way above her ankles. She stood poised firmly, half-way between the table and the curtained doorway, the insteps of her bare feet gleaming like marble on the overshadowed matting of the floor. The fall of her lighted shoulders, the strong and fine modelling of her arms hanging down her sides, her immobility, too, had something statuesque, the charm of art tense with life. She was not very big— Heyst used to think of her, at first, as "that poor little girl"—but revealed free from the shabby banality of a white platform dress, in the simple drapery of the sarong, there was that in her form and in the proportions of her body which suggested a reduction from a heroic size.

She moved forward a step.

"What is it you have missed?" she asked again.

Heyst turned his back altogether on the table. The black spokes of darkness over the floor and walls, the joining up on the ceiling in a patch of shadow, were like the bars of a cage about them. It was his turn to ignore a question.

"You woke up in a fright, you say?" he said.

She walked up to him, exotic yet familiar, with her white woman's face and shoulders above the Malay sarong, as if it were an airy disguise; but her expression was serious.

"No!" she replied. "It was distress, rather. You see, you weren't there, and I couldn't tell why you had gone away from me. A nasty dream—the first I've had, too, since—"

"You don't believe in dreams, do you?" asked Heyst.

"I once knew a woman who did. Leastwise, she used to tell people what dreams meant, for a shilling."

"Would you go now and ask her what this dream means?" inquired Heyst jocularly.

"She lived in Camberwell. She was a nasty old thing!"

Heyst laughed a little uneasily.

"Dreams are madness, my dear. It's things that happen in the waking world, while one is asleep, that one would be glad to know the meaning of."

"You have missed something out of this drawer," she said positively.

"This or some other. I have looked into every single one of them and come back to this again, as people do. It's difficult to believe the evidence of my own senses; but it isn't there. Now, Lena, are you sure that you didn't—"

"I have touched nothing in the house but what you have given me."

"Lena!" he cried.

He was painfully affected by this disclaimer of a charge which he had not made. It was what a servant might have said—an inferior open to suspicion—or, at any rate, a stranger. He was angry at being so wretchedly misunderstood; disenchanted at her not being instinctively aware of the place he had secretly given her in his thoughts.

"After all," he said to himself, "we are strangers to each other."

And then he felt sorry for her. He spoke calmly:

"I was about to say, are you sure you have no reason to think that the Chinaman has been in this room to-night?"

"You suspect him?" she asked, knitting her eyebrows.

"There is no one else to suspect. You may call it a certitude."

"You don't want to tell me what it is?" she inquired, in the equable tone in which one takes a fact into account.

Heyst only smiled faintly.

"Nothing very precious, as far as value goes," he replied.

"I thought it might have been money," she said.

"Money!" exclaimed Heyst, as if the suggestion had been altogether preposterous. She was so visibly surprised that he hastened to add: "Of course, there is some money in the house—there, in that writing-desk, the drawer on the left. It's not locked. You can pull it right out. There is a recess, and the board at the back pivots; a very simple hiding-place, when you know the way to it. I discovered it by accident, and I keep our store of sovereigns in there. The treasure, my dear, is not big enough to require a cavern."

He paused, laughed very low, and returned her steady stare.

"The loose silver, some guilders and dollars, I have always kept in that unlocked left drawer. I have no doubt Wang knows what there is in it; but he isn't a thief, and that's why I—no, Lena, what I've missed is not gold or jewels; and that's what makes the fact interesting—which the theft of money cannot be."

She took a long breath, relieved to hear that it was not money. A great curiosity was depicted on her face, but she refrained from pressing him with questions. She only gave him one of her deep-gleaming smiles.

"It isn't me, so it must be Wang. You ought to make him give it back to you."

Heyst said nothing to that naïve and practical suggestion, for the object that he missed from the drawer was his revolver.

It was a heavy weapon which he had owned for many years and had never used in his life. Ever since the London furniture had arrived in Samburan, it had been reposing in the drawer of the table. The real dangers of life, for him, were not those which could be repelled by swords or bullets. On the other hand, neither his manner nor his appearance looked sufficiently inoffensive to expose him to light-minded aggression.

He could not have explained what had induced him to go to the drawer in the middle of the night. He had started up suddenly—which was very unusual with him. He had found himself sitting up and extremely wide awake all at once, with the girl reposing by his side, lying

with her face away from him, a vague, characteristically feminine form in the dim light. She was perfectly still.

At that season of the year there were no mosquitoes in Samburan, and the sides of the mosquito-net were looped up. Heyst swung his feet to the floor, and found himself standing there, almost before he had become aware of his intention to get up. Why he did this he did not know. He didn't wish to wake her up, and the slight creak of the broad bedstead had sounded very loud to him. He turned round apprehensively and waited for her to move; but she did not stir. While he looked at her, he had a vision of himself lying there, too, also fast asleep, and—it occurred to him for the first time in his life—very defenceless. This quite novel impression of the dangers of slumber made him think suddenly of his revolver. He left the bedroom with noiseless footsteps. The lightness of the curtain he had to lift as he passed out, and the outer door, wide open on the blackness of the veranda—for the roof eaves came down low, shutting out the starlight—gave him a sense of having been dangerously exposed, he could not have said to what. He pulled the drawer open. Its emptiness cut his train of self-communion short. He murmured to the assertive fact:

"Impossible! Somewhere else!"

He tried to remember where he had put the thing; but those provoked whispers of memory were not encouraging. Foraging in every receptacle and nook big enough to contain a revolver, he came slowly to the conclusion that it was not in that room. Neither was it in the other. The whole bungalow consisted of the two rooms and a profuse allowance of veranda all round. Heyst stepped out on the veranda.

"It's Wang, beyond a doubt," he thought, staring into the night. "He has got hold of it for some reason."

There was nothing to prevent that ghostly Chinaman from materialising suddenly at the foot of the stairs, or anywhere, at any moment, and toppling him over with a dead sure shot. The danger was so irremediable that it was not worth worrying about, any more than the general precariousness of human life. Heyst speculated

on this added risk. How long had he been at the mercy of a slender yellow finger on the trigger? That is, if that was the fellow's reason for purloining the revolver.

"Shoot and inherit," thought Heyst. "Very simple!" Yet there was in his mind a marked reluctance to regard the domesticated grower of vegetables in the light of a murderer.

"No, it wasn't that. For Wang could have done it any time this last twelve months or more."

Heyst's mind had worked on the assumption that Wang had possessed himself of the revolver during his own absence from Samburan; but at that period of his speculation his point of view changed. It struck him with the force of manifest certitude that the revolver had been taken only late in the day, or on that very night. Wang, of course! But why? So there had been no danger in the past. It was all ahead.

"He has me at his mercy now," thought Heyst, without particular excitement.

The sentiment he experienced was curiosity. He forgot himself in it; it was as if he were considering somebody else's strange predicament. But even that sort of interest was dying out when, looking to his left, he saw the accustomed shapes of the other bungalows looming in the night, and remembered the arrival of the thirsty company in the boat. Wang would hardly risk such a crime in the presence of other white men. It was a peculiar instance of the "safety in numbers" principle, which somehow was not much to Heyst's taste.

He went in gloomily, and stood over the empty drawer in deep and unsatisfactory thought. He had just made up his mind that he must breathe nothing of this to the girl, when he heard her voice behind him. She had taken him by surprise, but he resisted the impulse to turn round at once under the impression that she might read his trouble in his face. Yes, she had taken him by surprise; and for that reason the conversation which began was not exactly as he would have conducted it if he had been prepared for her pointblank question. He ought to have

said at once: "I've missed nothing." It was a deplorable thing that he should have let it come so far as to have her ask what it was he missed. He closed the conversation by saying lightly:

"It's an object of very small value. Don't worry about it—it isn't worth while. The best you can do is to go and lie down again, Lena."

Reluctant she turned away, and only in the doorway asked:

"And you?"

"I think I shall smoke a cheroot on the veranda. I don't feel sleepy for the moment."

"Well, don't be long."

He made no answer. She saw him standing there, very still, with a frown on his brow, and slowly dropped the curtain.

Heyst did really light a cheroot before going out again on the veranda. He glanced up from under the low eaves, to see by the stars how the night went on. It was going very slowly. Why it should have irked him he did not know; for he had nothing to expect from the dawn; but everything round him had become unreasonable, unsettled, and vaguely urgent, laying him under an obligation, but giving him no line of action. He felt contemptuously irritated with the situation. The outer world had broken upon him; and he did not know what wrong he had done to bring this on himself, any more than he knew what he had done to provoke the horrible calumny about his treatment of poor Morrison. For he could not forget this. It had reached the ears of one who needed to have the most perfect confidence in the rectitude of his conduct.

"And she only half disbelieves it," he thought, with hopeless humiliation.

This moral stab in the back seemed to have taken some of his strength from him, as a physical wound would have done. He had no desire to do anything—neither to bring Wang to terms in the matter of the revolver, nor to find out from the strangers who they were, and how their predicament had come about. He flung his glowing cigar away into the night. But Samburan was no longer a

solitude wherein he could indulge in all his moods. The fiery parabolic trail the cast-out stump traced in the air was seen from another veranda at a distance of some twenty yards. It was noted as a symptom of importance by an observer with his faculties greedy for signs, and in a state of alertness tense enough almost to hear the grass grow.

X

THE observer was Martin Ricardo. To him life was not a matter of passive renunciation, but of a particularly active warfare. He was not mistrustful of it, he was not disgusted with it, still less was he inclined to be suspicious of its disenchantments; but he was vividly aware that it held many possibilities of failure. Though very far from being a pessimist, he was not a man of foolish illusions. He did not like failure; not only because of its unpleasant and dangerous consequences, but also because of its damaging effect upon his own appreciation of Martin Ricardo. And this was a special job, of his own contriving, and of considerable novelty. It was not, so to speak, in his usual line of business—except, perhaps, from a moral standpoint, about which he was not likely to trouble his head. For these reasons Martin Ricardo was unable to sleep.

Mr. Jones, after repeated shivering fits, and after drinking much hot tea, had apparently fallen into deep slumber. He had very peremptorily discouraged attempts at conversation on the part of his faithful follower. Ricardo listened to his regular breathing. It was all very well for the governor. He looked upon it as a sort of sport. A gentleman naturally would. But this ticklish and important job had to be pulled off at all costs, both for honour and for safety. Ricardo rose quietly, and made his way on the veranda. He could not lie still. He wanted to go out for air; and he had a feeling that by the force of his eagerness even the darkness and the silence could be made to yield something to his eyes and ears.

He noted the stars, and stepped back again into the dense darkness. He resisted the growing impulse to go out and steal toward the other bungalow. It would have been madness to start prowling in the dark on unknown ground. And for what end? Unless to relieve the oppression. Immobility lay on his limbs like a leaden garment. And yet he was unwilling to give up. He persisted in his objectless vigil. The man of the island was keeping quiet.

It was at that moment that Ricardo's eyes caught the vanishing red trail of light made by the cigar—a startling revelation of the man's wakefulness. He could not suppress a low "Hallo!" and began to sidle along toward the door, with his shoulders rubbing the wall. For all he knew, the man might have been out in front by this time, observing the veranda. As a matter of fact, after flinging away the cheroot, Heyst had gone indoors with the feeling of a man who gives up an unprofitable occupation. But Ricardo fancied he could hear faint footfalls on the open ground, and dodged quickly into the room. There he drew breath, and meditated for a while. His next step was to feel for the matches on the tall desk, and to light the candle. He had to communicate to his governor views and reflections of such importance that it was absolutely necessary for him to watch their effect on the very countenance of the hearer. At first he had thought that these matters could have waited till daylight; but Heyst's wakefulness, disclosed in that startling way, made him feel suddenly certain that there could be no sleep for him that night.

He said as much to his governor. When the little dagger-like flame had done its best to dispel the darkness, Mr. Jones was to be seen reposing on a camp bedstead, in a distant part of the room. A railway rug concealed his spare form up to his very head, which rested on the other railway rug rolled up for a pillow. Ricardo plumped himself down cross-legged on the floor, very close to the low bedstead; so that Mr. Jones—who perhaps had not been so very profoundly asleep—on opening his eyes found them conveniently levelled at the face of his secretary.

"Eh? What is it you say? No sleep for you to-night? But why can't you let *me* sleep? Confound your fussiness!"

"Because that there fellow can't sleep—that's why. Dash me if he hasn't been doing a think just now! What business has he to think in the middle of the night?"

"How do you know?"

"He was out, sir—up in the middle of the night. My own eyes saw it."

"But how do you know that he was up to think?" inquired Mr. Jones. "It might have been anything—toothache, for instance. And you may have dreamed it for all I know. Didn't you try to sleep?"

"No, sir. I didn't even try to go to sleep."

Ricardo informed his patron of his vigil on the veranda, and of the revelation which put an end to it. He concluded that a man up with a cigar in the middle of the night must be doing a think.

Mr. Jones raised himself on his elbow. This sign of interest comforted his faithful henchman.

"Seems to me it's time we did a little think ourselves," added Ricardo, with more assurance. Long as they had been together the moods of his governor were still a source of anxiety to his simple soul.

"You are always making a fuss," remarked Mr. Jones, in a tolerant tone.

"Ay, but not for nothing, am I? You can't say that, sir. Mine may not be a gentleman's way of looking round a thing, but it isn't a fool's way, either. You've admitted that much yourself at odd times."

Ricardo was growing warmly argumentative. Mr. Jones interrupted him without heat.

"You haven't roused me to talk about yourself, I presume."

"No, sir." Ricardo remained silent for a minute, with the tip of his tongue caught between his teeth. "I don't think I could tell you anything about myself that you don't know," he continued. There was a sort of amused satisfaction in his tone which changed completely as he went on. "It's that man, over there, that's got to be talked over. I don't like him!"

He failed to observe the flicker of a ghastly smile on his governor's lips.

"Don't you?" murmured Mr. Jones, whose face, as he reclined on his elbow, was on a level with the top of his follower's head.

"No, sir," said Ricardo emphatically. The candle from the other side of the room threw his monstrous black shadow on the wall. "He—I don't know how to say it—he isn't hearty-like."

Mr. Jones agreed languidly in his own manner:

"He seems to be a very self-possessed man."

"Ay, that's it. Self—" Ricardo choked with indignation. "I would soon let out some of his self-possession through a hole between his ribs, if this weren't a special job!"

Mr. Jones had been making his own reflections, for he asked:

"Do you think he is suspicious?"

"I don't see very well what he can be suspicious of," pondered Ricardo. "Yet there he was, doing a think. And what could be the object of it? What made him get out of his bed in the middle of the night? 'Tain't fleas. surely."

"Bad conscience, perhaps," suggested Mr. Jones jocularly.

His faithful secretary suffered from irritation, and did not see the joke. In a fretful tone he declared that there was no such thing as conscience. There was such a thing as funk; but there was nothing to make that fellow funky in any special way. He admitted, however, that the man might have been uneasy at the arrival of strangers, because of all that plunder of his put away somewhere.

Ricardo glanced here and there, as if he were afraid of being overheard by the heavy shadows cast by the dim light all over the room. His patron, very quiet, spoke in a calm whisper:

"And perhaps that hotel-keeper has been lying to you about him. He may be a very poor devil indeed."

Ricardo shook his head slightly. The Schombergian theory of Heyst had become in him a profound conviction,

which he had absorbed as naturally as a sponge takes up water. His patron's doubts were a wanton denying of what was self-evident; but Ricardo's voice remained as before, a soft purring with a snarling undertone.

"I am sup-prised at you, sir! It's the very way them tame ones—the common 'yporcrits of the world—get on. When it comes to plunder drifting under one's very nose, there's not one of them that would keep his hands off. And I don't blame them. It's the way they do it that sets my back up. Just look at the story of how he got rid of that pal of his! Send a man home to croak of a cold on the chest—that's one of your tame tricks. And d'you mean to say, sir, that a man that's up to it wouldn't bag whatever he could lay his hands on in his 'yporcritical way? What was all that coal business? Tame citizen dodge; 'yporcrisy—nothing else. No, no, sir! The thing is to 'xtract it from him as neatly as possible. That's the job; and it isn't so simple as it looks. I reckon you have looked at it all round, sir, before you took up the notion of this trip."

"No." Mr. Jones was hardly audible, staring far away from his couch. "I didn't think about it much. I was bored."

"Ay, that you were—bad. I was feeling pretty desperate that afternoon when that bearded softy of a landlord got talking to me about this fellow here. Quite accidentally, it was. Well, sir, here we are after a mighty narrow squeak. I feel all limp yet; but never mind—his swag will pay for the lot!"

"He's all alone here," remarked Mr. Jones in a hollow murmur.

"Ye-es, in a way. Yes, alone enough. Yes, you may say he is."

"There's that Chinaman, though."

"Ay, there's the Chink," assented Ricardo rather absent-mindedly.

He was debating in his mind the advisability of making a clean breast of his knowledge of the girl's existence. Finally he concluded he wouldn't. The enterprise was difficult enough without complicating it with an upset

to the sensibilities of the gentleman with whom he had the honour of being associated. Let the discovery come of itself, he thought, and then he could swear that he had known nothing of that offensive presence.

He did not need to lie. He had only to hold his tongue.

"Yes," he muttered reflectively, "there's that Chink, certainly."

At bottom, he felt a certain ambiguous respect for his governor's exaggerated dislike of women, as if that horror of feminine presence were a sort of depraved morality; but still morality, since he counted it as an advantage. It prevented many undesirable complications. He did not pretend to understand it. He did not even try to investigate this idiosyncrasy of his chief. All he knew was that he himself was differently inclined, and that it did not make him any happier or safer. He did not know how it would have acted if he had been knocking about the world on his own. Luckily he was a subordinate, not a wage-slave but a follower—which was a restraint. Yes! The other sort of disposition simplified matters in general; it wasn't to be gainsaid. But it was clear that it could also complicate them—as in this most important and, in Ricardo's view, already sufficiently delicate case. And the worst of it was that one could not tell exactly in what precise manner it would act.

It was unnatural, he thought somewhat peevishly. How was one to reckon up the unnatural? There were no rules for that. The faithful henchman of plain Mr. Jones, foreseeing many difficulties of a material order, decided to keep the girl out of the governor's knowledge; out of his sight, too, for as long a time as it could be managed. That, alas, seemed to be at most a matter of a few hours; whereas Ricardo feared that to get the affair properly going would take some days. Once well started, he was not afraid of his gentleman failing him. As is often the case with lawless natures, Ricardo's faith in any given individual was of a simple, unquestioning character. For man must have some support in life.

Cross-legged, his head drooping a little and perfectly still, he might have been meditating in a bonze-like atti-

tude upon the sacred syllable "Om." It was a striking illustration of the untruth of appearances, for his contempt for the world was of a severely practical kind. There was nothing oriental about Ricardo but the amazing quietness of his pose. Mr. Jones was also very quiet. He had let his head sink on the rolled-up rug, and lay stretched out on his side with his back to the light. In that position the shadows gathered in the cavities of his eyes made them look perfectly empty. When he spoke, his ghostly voice had only to travel a few inches straight into Ricardo's left ear.

"Why don't you say something, now that you've got me awake?"

"I wonder if you were sleeping as sound as you are trying to make out, sir," said the unmoved Ricardo.

"I wonder," repeated Mr. Jones. "At any rate, I was resting quietly."

"Come, sir!" Ricardo's whisper was alarmed. "You don't mean to say you're going to be bored?"

"No."

"Quite right!" The secretary was very much relieved. "There's no occasion to be, I can tell you, sir," he whispered earnestly. "Anything but that! If I didn't say anything for a bit, it ain't because there isn't plenty to talk about. Ay, more than enough."

"What's the matter with you?" breathed out his patron. "Are you going to turn pessimist?"

"Me turn? No, sir! I ain't of those that turn. You may call me hard names, if you like, but you know very well that I ain't a croaker." Ricardo changed his tone. "If I said nothing for a while, it was because I was meditating over the Chink, sir."

"You were? Waste of time, my Martin. A Chinaman is unfathomable."

Ricardo admitted that this might be so. Anyhow, a Chink was neither here nor there, as a general thing, unfathomable as he might be; but a Swedish baron wasn't—couldn't be! The woods were full of such barons.

"I don't know that he is so tame," was Mr. Jones's remark in a sepulchral undertone.

"How do you mean, sir? He ain't a rabbit, of course. You couldn't hypnotise him, as I saw you do to more than one Dago, and other kinds of tame citizens, when it came to the point of holding them down to a game."

"Don't you reckon on that," murmured plain Mr. Jones seriously.

"No, sir, I don't; though you have a wonderful power of the eye. It's a fact."

"I have a wonderful patience," remarked Mr. Jones drily.

A dim smile flitted over the lips of the faithful Ricardo, who never raised his head.

"I don't want to try you too much, sir; but this is like no other job we ever turned our minds to."

"Perhaps not. At any rate let us think so."

A weariness with the monotony of life was reflected in the tone of this qualified assent. It jarred on the nerves of the sanguine Ricardo.

"Let us think of the way to go to work," he retorted a little impatiently. "He's a deep one. Just look at the way he treated that chum of his. Did you ever hear of anything so low? And the artfulness of the beast—the dirty, tame artfulness!"

"Don't you start moralising, Martin," said Mr. Jones warningly. "As far as I can make out the story that German hotel-keeper told you, it seems to show a certain amount of character; and independence from common feelings which is not usual. It's very remarkable, if true."

"Ay, ay! Very remarkable. It's mighty low down, all the same," muttered Ricardo obstinately. "I must say I am glad to think he will be paid off for it in a way that'll surprise him!"

The tip of his tongue appeared lively for an instant, as if trying for the taste of that ferocious retribution on his compressed lips. For Ricardo was sincere in his indignation before the elementary principle of loyalty to a chum violated in cold blood, slowly, in a patient duplicity of years. There are standards in villainy as in virtue, and the act as he pictured it to himself acquired an additional

horror from the slow pace of that treachery so atrocious and so tame. But he understood too the educated judgment of his governor, a gentleman looking on all this with the privileged detachment of a cultivated mind, of an elevated personality.

"Ay, he's deep—he's artful," he mumbled between his sharp teeth.

"Confound you!" Mr. Jones's calm whisper crept into his ear. "Come to the point."

Obedient, the secretary shook off his thoughtfulness. There was a similarity of mind between these two—one the outcast of his vices, the other inspired by a spirit of scornful defiance, the aggressiveness of a beast of prey looking upon all the tame creatures of the earth as its natural victims. Both were astute enough, however, and both were aware that they had plunged into this adventure without a sufficient scrutiny of detail. The figure of a lonely man far from all assistance had loomed up largely, fascinating and defenceless in the middle of the sea, filling the whole field of their vision. There had not seemed to be any need for thinking. As Schomberg had been saying: "Three to one."

But it did not look so simple now in the face of that solitude which was like an armour for this man. The feeling voiced by the henchman in his own way—"We don't seem much forwarder now we are here"—was acknowledged by the silence of the patron. It was easy enough to rip a fellow up or drill a hole in him, whether he was alone or not, Ricardo reflected in low, confidential tones, but—

"He isn't alone," Mr. Jones said faintly, in his attitude of a man composed for sleep. "Don't forget that Chinaman." Ricardo started slightly.

"Oh, ay—the Chink!"

Ricardo had been on the point of confessing about the girl; but no! He wanted his governor to be unperturbed and steady. Vague thoughts, which he hardly dared to look in the face, were stirring in his brain in connection with that girl. She couldn't be much account, he thought. She could be frightened. And there were

also other possibilities. The Chink, however, could be considered openly.

"What I was thinking about it, sir," he went on earnestly, "is this—here we've got a man. He's nothing. If he won't be good, he can be made quiet. That's easy. But then there's his plunder. He doesn't carry it in his pocket."

"I hope not," breathed Mr. Jones.

"Same here. It's too big, we know; but if he were alone, he would not feel worried about it overmuch—I mean the safety of the pieces. He would just put the lot into any box or drawer that was handy."

"Would he?"

"Yes, sir. He would keep it under his eye, as it were. Why not? It is natural. A fellow doesn't put his swag underground, unless there's a very good reason for it."

"A very good reason, eh?"

"Yes, sir. What do you think a fellow is—a mole?"

From his experience, Ricardo declared that man was not a burrowing beast. Even the misers very seldom buried their hoard, unless for exceptional reasons. In the given situation of a man alone on an island, the company of a Chink was a very good reason. Drawers would not be safe, nor boxes, either, from a prying, slant-eyed Chink. No, sir; unless a safe—a proper office safe. But the safe was there in the room.

"Is there a safe in this room? I didn't notice it," whispered Mr. Jones.

That was because the thing was painted white, like the walls of the room; and besides, it was tucked away in the shadows of a corner. Mr. Jones had been too tired to observe anything on his first coming ashore; but Ricardo had very soon spotted the characteristic form. He only wished he could believe that the plunder of treachery, duplicity, and all the moral abominations of Heyst had been there. But no; the blamed thing was open.

"It might have been there at one time or another," he commented gloomily, "but it isn't there now."

"The man did not elect to live in this house," remarked

Mr. Jones. "And by the by, what could he have meant by speaking of circumstances which prevented him lodging us in the other bungalow? You remember what he said, Martin? Sounded cryptic."

Martin, who remembered and understood the phrase as directly motived by the existence of the girl, waited a little before saying:

"Some of his artfulness, sir; and not the worst of it, either. That manner of his to us, this asking no questions, is some more of his artfulness. A man's bound to be curious, and he is; yet he goes on as if he didn't care. He does care—or else what was he doing up with a cigar in the middle of the night, doing a think? I don't like it!"

"He may be outside, observing the light here, and saying the very same thing to himself of our own wakefulness," gravely suggested Ricardo's governor.

"He may be, sir; but this is too important to be talked over in the dark. And the light is all right. It can be accounted for. There's a light in this bungalow in the middle of the night because—why, because you are not well. Not well, sir—that's what's the matter; and you will have to act up to it."

This consideration had suddenly occurred to the faithful henchman, in the light of a felicitous expedient to keep his governor and the girl apart as long as possible. Mr. Jones received the suggestion without the slightest stir, even in the deep sockets of his eyes, where a steady, faint gleam was the only thing telling of life and attention in his attenuated body. But Ricardo, as soon as he had enunciated his happy thought, perceived in it other possibilities more to the point and of greater practical advantage.

"With your looks, sir, it will be easy enough," he went on evenly, as if no silence had intervened, always respectful, but frank, with perfect simplicity of purpose. "All you've got to do is just to lie down quietly. I noticed him looking sort of surprised at you on the wharf, sir."

At these words, a naïve tribute to the aspect of his physique, even more suggestive of the grave than of the

sick-bed, a fold appeared on that side of the governor's face which was exposed to the dim light—a deep, shadowy, semicircular fold from the side of the nose to bottom of the chin—a silent smile. By a side glance Ricardo had noted this play of feature. He smiled, too, appreciative, encouraged.

"And you as hard as nails all the time," he went on. "Hang me if anybody would believe you aren't sick, if I were to swear myself black in the face! Give us a day or two to look into matters and size up that 'yporcrit."

Ricardo's eyes remained fixed on his crossed shins. The chief, in his lifeless accents, approved.

"Perhaps it would be a good idea."

"The Chink, he's nothing. He can be made quiet any time."

One of Ricardo's hands, reposing palm upward on his folded legs, made a swift thrusting gesture, repeated by the enormous darting shadow of an arm very low on the wall. It broke the spell of perfect stillness in the room. The secretary eyed moodily the wall from which the shadow had gone. Anybody could be made quiet, he pointed out. It was not anything that the Chink could do; no, it was the effect that his company must have produced on the conduct of the doomed man. A man! What was a man? A Swedish baron could be ripped up, or else holed by a shot, as easily as any other creature; but that was exactly what was to be avoided, till one knew where he had hidden his plunder.

"I shouldn't think it would be some sort of hole in his bungalow," argued Ricardo with real anxiety.

No. A house can be burnt—set on fire accidentally, or on purpose, while a man's asleep. Under the house—or in some crack, cranny, or crevice? Something told him it wasn't that. The anguish of mental effort contracted Ricardo's brow. The skin of his head seemed to move in this travail of vain and tormenting suppositions.

"What did you think a fellow is, sir—a baby?" he said, in answer to Mr. Jones's objections. "I am trying to find out what I would do myself. He wouldn't be likely to be cleverer than I am."

"And what do you know about yourself?"

Mr. Jones seemed to watch his follower's perplexities with amusement concealed in a death-like composure.

Ricardo disregarded the question. The material vision of the spoil absorbed all his faculties. A great vision! He seemed to see it. A few small canvas bags tied up with thin cord, their distended rotundity showing the inside pressure of the disk-like forms of coins—gold, solid, heavy eminently portable. Perhaps steel cash-boxes with a chased design on the covers; or perhaps a black and brass box with a handle on the top, and full of goodness knows what. Bank notes? Why not? The fellow had been going home; so it was surely something worth going home with.

"And he may have put it anywhere outside—anywhere!" cried Ricardo in a deadened voice. "In the forest—"

That was it! A temporary darkness replaced the dim light of the room. The darkness of the forest at night, and in it the gleam of a lantern, by which a figure is digging at the foot of a tree-trunk. As likely as not, another figure holding that lantern—ha, feminine! The girl!

The prudent Ricardo stifled a picturesque and profane exclamation, partly joy, partly dismay. Had the girl been trusted or mistrusted by that man? Whatever it was, it was bound to be wholly! With women there could be no half-measures. He could not imagine a fellow half-trusting a woman in that intimate relation to himself, and in those particular circumstances of conquest and loneliness where no confidences could appear dangerous since, apparently, there could be no one she could give him away to. Moreover in nine cases out of ten, the woman would be trusted. But, trusted or mistrusted, was her presence a favourable or unfavourable condition of the problem? That was the question!

The temptation to consult his chief, to talk over the weighty fact and get his opinion on it, was great indeed. Ricardo resisted it; but the agony of his solitary mental conflict was extremely sharp. A woman in a problem

is an incalculable quantity, even if you have something to go upon in forming your guess. How much more so when you haven't even once caught sight of her.

Swift as were his mental processes, he felt that a longer silence was inadvisable. He hastened to speak:

"And do you see us, sir, you and I, with a couple of spades having to tackle this whole confounded island?"

He allowed himself a slight movement of the arm. The shadow enlarged it into a sweeping gesture.

"This seems rather discouraging, Martin," murmured the unmoved governor.

"We mustn't be discouraged—that's all," retorted his henchman. "And after what we had to go through in that boat too! Why it would be—"

He couldn't find the qualifying words. Very calm, faithful, and yet astute, he expressed his new-born hopes darkly.

"Something's sure to turn up to give us a hint; only this job can't be rushed. You may depend on me to pick up the least little bit of a hint; but you, sir—you've got to play him very gently. For the rest you can trust me."

"Yes; but I ask myself what *you* are trusting to."

"Our luck," said the faithful Ricardo. "Don't say a word against that. It might spoil the run of it."

"You are a superstitious beggar. No, I won't say anything against it."

"That's right, sir. Don't you even think lightly of it. Luck's not to be played with."

"Yes, luck's a delicate thing," assented Mr. Jones in a dreamy whisper.

A short silence ensued, which Ricardo ended in a discreet and tentative voice.

"Talking of luck, I suppose he could be made to take a hand with you, sir—two-handed picket or ekkarty, you being seedy and keeping indoors—just to pass the time. For all we know, he may be one of them hot ones once they start—"

"Is it likely?" came coldly from the principal. "Considering what we know of his history—say with his partner."

"True, sir. He's a cold-blooded beast; a cold-blooded, inhuman—"

"And I'll tell you another thing that isn't likely. He would not be likely to let himself be stripped bare. We haven't to do with a young fool that can be led on by chaff or flattery, and in the end simply over-awed. This is a calculating man."

Ricardo recognised that clearly. What he had in his mind was something on a small scale, just to keep the enemy busy while he, Ricardo, had time to nose around a bit.

"You could even lose a little money to him, sir," he suggested.

"I could."

Ricardo was thoughtful for a moment.

"He strikes me, too, as the sort of man to start prancing when one didn't expect it. What do you think, sir? Is he a man that would prance? That is, if something startled him. More likely to prance than to run—what?"

The answer came at once, because Mr. Jones understood the peculiar idiom of his faithful follower.

"Oh, without doubt! Without doubt!"

"It does me good to hear that you think so. He's a prancing beast, and so we mustn't startle him—not till I have located the stuff. Afterward—"

Ricardo paused, sinister in the stillness of his pose. Suddenly he got up with a swift movement and gazed down at his chief in moody abstraction. Mr. Jones did not stir.

"There's one thing that's worrying me," began Ricardo in a subdued voice.

"Only one?" was the faint comment from the motionless body on the bedstead.

"I mean more than all the others put together."

"That's grave news."

"Ay, grave enough. It's this—how do you feel in yourself, sir? Are you likely to get bored? I know them fits come on you suddenly; but surely you can tell—"

"Martin, you are an ass."

The moody face of the secretary brightened up.

"Really, sir? Well, I am quite content to be on these terms—I mean as long as you don't get bored. It wouldn't do, sir."

For coolness, Ricardo had thrown open his shirt and rolled up his sleeves. He moved stealthily across the room, bare-footed, toward the candle, the shadow of his head and shoulders growing bigger behind him on the opposite wall, to which the face of plain Mr. Jones was turned. With a feline movement, Ricardo glanced over his shoulder at the thin back of the spectre reposing on the bed, and then blew out the candle.

"In fact, I am rather amused, Martin," Mr. Jones said in the dark.

He heard the sound of a slapped thigh and the jubilant exclamation of his henchman:

"Good! That's the way to talk, sir!"

PART IV

I

RICARDO advanced prudently by short darts from one tree-trunk to another, more in the manner of a squirrel than a cat. The sun had risen some time before. Already the sparkle of open sea was encroaching rapidly on the dark, cool, early-morning blue of Diamond Bay; but the deep dusk lingered yet under the mighty pillars of the forest, between which the secretary dodged.

He was watching Number One's bungalow with an animal-like patience, if with a very human complexity of purpose. This was the second morning of such watching. The first one had not been rewarded by success. Well, strictly speaking, there was no hurry.

The sun, swinging above the ridge all at once, inundated with light the space of burnt grass in front of Ricardo and the face of the bungalow, on which his eyes were fixed, leaving only the one dark spot of the doorway. To his right, to his left, and behind him, splashes of gold appeared in the deep shade of the forest, thinning the gloom under the ragged roof of leaves.

This was not a very favourable circumstance for Ricardo's purpose. He did not wish to be detected in his patient occupation. For what he was watching for was a sight of the girl—that girl! Just a glimpse across the burnt patch to see what she was like. He had excellent eyes, and the distance was not so great. He would be able to distinguish her face quite easily if she only came out on the veranda; and she was bound to do that sooner or later. He was confident that he could form some opinion about her—which, he felt, was very necessary, before venturing on some steps

to get in touch with her behind that Swedish baron's back. His theoretical view of the girl was such that he was quite prepared, on the strength of that distant examination, to show himself discreetly—perhaps even make a sign. It all depended on his reading of the face. She couldn't be much. He knew that sort!

By protruding his head a little he commanded, through the foliage of a festooning creeper, a view of the three bungalows, irregularly disposed along a flat curve. Over the veranda rail of the farthermost one hung a dark rug of a tartan pattern, amazingly conspicuous. Ricardo could see the very checks. A brisk fire of sticks was burning on the ground in front of the steps, and in the sunlight the thin, fluttering flame had paled almost to invisibility—a mere rosy stir under a faint wreath of smoke. He could see the white bandage on the head of Pedro bending over it, and the wisps of black hair sticking up weirdly. He had wound that bandage himself, after breaking that shaggy and enormous head. The creature balanced it like a load, staggering toward the steps. Ricardo could see a small, long-handled saucepan at the end of a great hairy paw.

Yes, he could see all that there was to be seen, far and near. Excellent eyes! The only thing they could not penetrate was the dark oblong of the doorway on the veranda under the low eaves of the bungalow's roof. And that was vexing. It was an outrage. Ricardo was easily outraged. Surely she would come out presently! Why didn't she? Surely the fellow did not tie her up to the bed-post before leaving the house!

Nothing appeared. Ricardo was as still as the leafy cables of creepers depending in a convenient curtain from the mighty limb sixty feet above his head. His very eyelids were still, and this unblinking watchfulness gave him the dreamy air of a cat posed on a hearth-rug contemplating the fire. Was he dreaming? There, in plain sight, he had before him a white, blouse-like jacket, short blue trousers, a pair of bare yellow calves, a pigtail, long and slender—

"The confounded Chink!" he muttered, astounded.

He was not conscious of having looked away; and yet right there, in the middle of the picture, without having come round the right-hand corner or the left-hand corner of the house, without falling from the sky or surging up from the ground, Wang had become visible, as large as life, and engaged in the young-ladyish occupation of picking flowers. Step by step, stooping repeatedly over the flower-beds at the foot of the veranda, the startlingly materialised Chinaman passed off the scene in a very commonplace manner, by going up the steps and disappearing in the darkness of the doorway.

Only then the yellow eyes of Martin Ricardo lost their intent fixity. He understood that it was time for him to be moving. That bunch of flowers going into the house in the hand of a Chinaman was for the breakfast-table. What else could it be for?

"I'll give you flowers!" he muttered threateningly. "You wait!"

Another moment, just for a glance toward the Jones bungalow, whence he expected Heyst to issue on his way to that breakfast so offensively decorated, and Ricardo began his retreat. His impulse, his desire, was for a rush into the open, face to face with the appointed victim, for what he called a "ripping up," visualised greedily, and always with the swift preliminary stooping movement on his part—the forerunner of certain death to his adversary. This was his impulse; and as it was, so to speak, constitutional, it was extremely difficult to resist when his blood was up. What could be more trying than to have to skulk and dodge and restrain oneself, mentally and physically, when one's blood was up? Mr. Secretary Ricardo began his retreat from his post of observation behind a tree opposite Heyst's bungalow, using great care to remain unseen. His proceedings were made easier by the declivity of the ground, which sloped sharply down to the water's edge. There, his feet feeling the warmth of the island's rocky foundation already heated by the sun, through the thin soles of his straw slippers, he was, as it were, sunk out of sight of the houses. A short scramble of some twenty feet brought him up again to the

upper level, at the place where the jetty had its root in the shore. He leaned his back against one of the lofty uprights which still held up the company's sign-board above the mound of derelict coal. Nobody could have guessed how much his blood was up. To contain himself he folded his arms tightly on his breast.

Ricardo was not used to a prolonged effort of self-control. His craft, his artfulness, felt themselves always at the mercy of his nature, which was truly feral and only held in subjection by the influence of the "governor," the prestige of a gentleman. It had its cunning too, but it was being almost too severely tried since the feral solution of a growl and a spring was forbidden by the problem. Ricardo dared not venture out on the cleared ground. He dared not.

"If I meet the beggar," he thought, "I don't know what I mayn't do. I daren't trust myself."

What exasperated him just now was his inability to understand Heyst. Ricardo was human enough to suffer from the discovery of his limitations. No, he couldn't size Heyst up. He could kill him with extreme ease—a growl and a spring—but that was forbidden! However, he could not remain indefinitely under the funereal blackboard.

"I must make a move," he thought.

He moved on, his head swimming a little with the repressed desire of violence, and came out openly in front of the bungalows, as if he had just been down to the jetty to look at the boat. The sunshine enveloped him, very brilliant, very still, very hot. The three buildings faced him. The one with the rug on the balustrade was the most distant; next to it was the empty bungalow; the nearest, with the flower-beds at the foot of its veranda, contained that bothersome girl, who had managed so provokingly to keep herself invisible. That was why Ricardo's eyes lingered on that building. The girl would surely be easier to "size up" than Heyst. A sight of her, a mere glimpse, would have been something to go by, a step nearer to the goal—the first real move, in fact. Ricardo saw no other move. And any time she might appear on that veranda!

She did not appear; but, like a concealed magnet, she exercised her attraction. As he went on, he deviated towards the bungalow. Though his movements were deliberate, his feral instincts had such sway that if he had met Heyst walking toward him, he would have had to satisfy his need of violence. But he saw nobody. Wang was at the back of the house, keeping the coffee hot against Number One's return for breakfast. Even the simian Pedro was out of sight, no doubt crouching on the door-step, his red little eyes fastened with animal-like devotion on Mr. Jones, who was in discourse with Heyst in the other bungalow—the conversation of an evil spectre with a disarmed man, watched by an ape.

His will having very little to do with it, Ricardo, darting swift glances in all directions, found himself at the steps of the Heyst bungalow. Once there, falling under an uncontrollable force of attraction, he mounted them with a savage and stealthy action of his limbs, and paused for a moment under the eaves to listen to the silence. Presently he advanced over the threshold one leg—it seemed to stretch itself, like a limb of india-rubber—planted his foot within, brought up the other swiftly, and stood inside the room, turning his head from side to side. To his eyes, brought in there from the dazzling sunshine, all was gloom for a moment. His pupils, like a cat's, dilating swiftly, he distinguished an enormous quantity of books. He was amazed; and he was put off, too. He was vexed in his astonishment. He had meant to note the aspect and nature of things, and hoped to draw some useful inference, some hint as to the man. But what guess could one make out of a multitude of books? He didn't know what to think; and he formulated his bewilderment in the mental exclamation:

"What the devil has this fellow been trying to set up here—a school!"

He gave a prolonged stare to the portrait of Heyst's father, that severe profile ignoring the vanities of this earth. His eyes gleamed sideways at the heavy silver candlesticks—signs of opulence. He prowled as a stray cat entering a strange place might have done; for if

Ricardo had not Wang's miraculous gift of materialising and vanishing, rather than coming and going, he could be nearly as noiseless in his less elusive movements. He noted the back door standing just ajar; and all the time his slightly pointed ears, at the utmost stretch of watchfulness, kept in touch with the profound silence outside enveloping the absolute stillness of the house.

He had not been in the room two minutes when it occurred to him that he must be alone in the bungalow. The woman, most likely, had sneaked out, and was walking about somewhere in the grounds at the back. She had been probably ordered to keep out of sight. Why? Because the fellow mistrusted his guests; or was it because he mistrusted *her*?

Ricardo reflected that from a certain point of view it amounted nearly to the same thing. He remembered Schomberg's story. He felt that running away with somebody only to get clear of that beastly, tame, hotel-keeper's attentions, was no proof of hopeless infatuation. She could be got in touch with.

His moustaches stirred. For some time he had been looking at a closed door. He would peep into that other room, and perhaps see something more informing than a confounded lot of books. As he crossed over, he thought recklessly:

"If the beggar comes in suddenly, and starts to prance, I'll rip him up and be done with it!"

He laid his hand on the handle, and felt the door come unlatched. Before he pulled it open, he listened again to the silence. He felt it all about him, complete, without a flaw.

The necessity of prudence had exasperated his self-restraint. A mood of ferocity woke up in him, and, as always at such times, he became physically aware of the sheathed knife strapped to his leg. He pulled at the door with fierce curiosity. It came open without a squeak of hinge, without a rustle, with no sound at all; and he found himself glaring at the opaque surface of some rough blue stuff, like serge. A curtain was fitted inside, heavy enough and long enough not to stir.

A curtain! This unforeseen veil, baffling his curiosity, checked his brusqueness. He did not fling it aside with an impatient movement; he only looked at it closely, as if its texture had to be examined before his hand could touch such stuff. In this interval of hesitation he seemed to detect a flaw in the perfection of the silence, the faintest possible rustle, which his ears caught and instantly, in the effort of conscious listening, lost again. No! Everything was still inside and outside the house, only he had no longer the sense of being alone there.

When he put out his hand toward the motionless folds, it was with extreme caution, and merely to push the stuff aside a little, advancing his head at the same time to peep within. A moment of complete immobility ensued. Then, without anything else of him stirring, Ricardo's head shrank back on his shoulders, his arm descended slowly to his side. There was a woman in there. The very woman! Lighted dimly by the reflection of the outer glare, she loomed up strangely big and shadowy at the other end of the long, narrow room. With her back to the door, she was doing her hair with her bare arms uplifted. One of them gleamed pearly white; the other detached its perfect form in black against the unshuttered, uncurtained square window-hole. She was there, her fingers busy with her dark hair, utterly unconscious, exposed and defenceless—and tempting.

Ricardo drew back one foot and pressed his elbows close to his sides; his chest started heaving convulsively, as if he were wrestling or running a race; his body began to sway gently back and forth. The self-restraint was at an end: his psychology must have its way. The instinct for the feral spring could no longer be denied. Ravish or kill—it was all one to him, as long as by the act he liberated the suffering soul of savagery repressed for so long. After a quick glance over his shoulder, which hunters of big game tell us no lion or tiger omits to give before charging home, Ricardo charged, head down, straight at the curtain. The stuff, tossed up violently by his rush, settled itself with a slow, floating descent into vertical folds, motionless, without a shudder even, in the still, warm air.

II

THE clock—which once upon a time had measured the hours of philosophic meditation—could not have ticked away more than five seconds when Wang materialised within the living-room. His concern primarily was with the delayed breakfast, but at once his slanting eyes became immovably fixed upon the unstirring curtain. For it was behind it that he had located the strange, deadened scuffling sounds which filled the empty room. The slanting eyes of his race could not achieve a round, amazed stare; but they remained still, dead still, and his impassive yellow face grew all at once careworn and lean with the sudden strain of intense, doubtful, frightened watchfulness. Contrary impulses swayed his body, rooted to the floor-mats. He even went so far as to extend his hand toward the curtain. He could not reach it, and he didn't make the necessary step forward.

The mysterious struggle was going on with confused thuds of bare feet, in a mute wrestling match, no human sound, hiss, groan, murmur, or exclamation coming through the curtain. A chair fell over, not with a crash but lightly, as if just grazed, and a faint metallic ring of the tin bath succeeded. Finally the tense silence, as of two adversaries locked in a deadly grip, was ended by the heavy, dull thump of a soft body flung against the inner partition of planks. It seemed to shake the whole bungalow. By that time, walking backward, his eyes, his very throat, strained with fearful excitement, his extended arm still pointing at the curtain, Wang had disappeared through the back door. Once out in the compound, he bolted round the end of the house. Emerging innocently between the two bungalows he lingered and lounged in the open, where anybody issuing from any of the dwellings was bound to see him—a self-possessed Chinaman idling there, with nothing but perhaps an unserved breakfast on his mind.

It was at this time that Wang made up his mind to give up all connection with Number One, a man not only disarmed but already half vanquished. Till that morning he had had doubts as to his course of action, but this

overheard scuffle decided the question. Number One was a doomed man—one of those beings whom it is unlucky to help. Even as he walked in the open with a fine air of unconcern, Wang wondered that no sound of any sort was to be heard inside the house. For all he knew, the white woman might have been scuffling in there with an evil spirit, which had of course killed her. For nothing visible came out of the house he watched out of the slanting corner of his eye. The sunshine and the silence outside the bungalow reigned undisturbed.

But in the house the silence of the big room would not have struck an acute ear as perfect. It was troubled by a stir so faint that it could hardly be called a ghost of whispering from behind the curtain.

Ricardo, feeling his throat with tender care, breathed out admiringly:

"You have fingers like steel. Jimminy! You have muscle like a giant!"

Luckily for Lena, Ricardo's onset had been so sudden—she was winding her two heavy tresses round her head—that she had no time to lower her arms. This, which saved them from being pinned to her sides, gave her a better chance to resist. His spring had nearly thrown her down. Luckily, again, she was standing so near the wall that, though she was driven against it headlong, yet the shock was not heavy enough to knock all the breath out of her body. On the contrary, it helped her first instinctive attempt to drive her assailant backward.

After the first gasp of a surprise that was really too overpowering for a cry, she was never in doubt of the nature of the danger. She defended herself in the full, clear knowledge of it, from the force of instinct which is the true source of every great display of energy, and with a determination which could hardly have been expected from a girl who, cornered in a dim corridor by the red-faced, stammering Schomberg, had trembled with shame, disgust, and fear; had drooped, terrified, before mere words spluttered out odiously by a man who had never in his life laid his big paw on her.

This new enemy's attack was simple, straightforward

violence. It was not the slimy, underhand plotting to deliver her up like a slave, which had sickened her heart and had made her feel in her loneliness that her oppressors were too many for her. She was no longer alone in the world now. She resisted without a moment of faltering, because she was no longer deprived of moral support; because she was a human being who counted; because she was no longer defending herself for herself alone; because of the faith that had been born in her—the faith in the man of her destiny, and perhaps in the Heaven which had sent him so wonderfully to cross her path.

She had defended herself principally by maintaining a desperate, murderous clutch on Ricardo's windpipe, till she felt a sudden relaxation of the terrific hug in which he stupidly and ineffectually persisted to hold her. Then, with a supreme effort of her arms and of her suddenly raised knee, she sent him flying against the partition. The cedar-wood chest stood in the way, and Ricardo, with a thump which boomed hollow through the whole bungalow, fell on it in a sitting posture, half-strangled, and exhausted not so much by the efforts as by the emotions of the struggle.

With the recoil of her exerted strength, she too reeled, staggered back, and sat on the edge of the bed. Out of breath, but calm and unabashed, she busied herself in readjusting under her arms the brown and yellow figured Celebes sarong, the tuck of which had come undone during the fight. Then, folding her bare arms tightly on her breast, she leaned forward on her crossed legs, determined and without fear.

Ricardo, leaning forward too, his nervous force gone, crestfallen like a beast of prey that has missed its spring, met her big grey eyes looking at him—wide open, observing, mysterious—from under the dark arches of her courageous eyebrows. Their faces were not a foot apart. He ceased feeling about his aching throat, and dropped the palms of his hands heavily on his knees. He was not looking at her bare shoulders, at her strong arms; he was looking down at the floor. He had lost one of his straw slippers. A chair with a white dress on it had been overturned.

These, with splashes of water on the floor out of a brusquely misplaced sponge-bath, were the only traces of the struggle.

Ricardo swallowed twice consciously, as if to make sure of his throat, before he spoke again:

"All right. I never meant to hurt you—though I am no joker when it comes to it."

He pulled up the leg of his pyjamas to exhibit the strapped knife. She glanced at it without moving her head, and murmured, with scornful bitterness:

"Ah, yes—with that thing stuck in my side. In no other way."

He shook his head with a shamefaced smile.

"Listen! I am quiet now. Straight—I am. I don't need to explain why—you know how it is. And I can see, now, this wasn't the way with you."

She made no sound. Her still, upward gaze had a patient mournfulness which troubled him like a suggestion of an inconceivable depth. He added doubtfully:

"You are not going to make a noise about this silly try of mine?"

She moved her head the least bit.

"Jee-miny! You are a wonder," he murmured earnestly, relieved more than she could have guessed.

Of course, if she had attempted to run out, he would have stuck the knife between her shoulders, to stop her screaming; but all the fat would have been in the fire, the business utterly spoiled, and the rage of the governor —especially when he learned the cause—boundless. A woman that does not make a noise after an attempt of that kind has tacitly condoned the offence. Ricardo had no small vanities. But clearly, if she would pass it over like this, then he could not be so utterly repugnant to her. He felt flattered. And she didn't seem afraid of him either. He already felt almost tender toward the girl—that plucky, fine girl who had not tried to run screaming from him.

"We shall be friends yet. I don't give you up. Don't think it. Friends as friends can be!" he whispered confidently. "Jee-miny! You aren't a tame one. Neither am I. You will find that out before long."

He could not know that if she had not run out, it was because that morning, under the stress of growing uneasiness at the presence of the incomprehensible visitors, Heyst had confessed to her that it was his revolver he had been looking for in the night; that it was gone; that he was a disarmed, defenceless man. She had hardly comprehended the meaning of his confession. Now she understood better what it meant. The effort of her self-control, her stillness, impressed Ricardo. Suddenly she spoke:

"What are you after?"

He did not raise his eyes. His hands reposing on his knees, his drooping head, something reflective in his pose, suggested the weariness of a simple soul, the fatigue of a mental rather than physical contest. He answered the direct question by a direct statement, as if he were too tired to dissemble:

"After the swag."

The word was strange to her. The veiled ardour of her grey gaze from under the dark eyebrows never left Ricardo's face.

"A swag?" she murmured quietly. "What's that?"

"Why, swag, plunder—what your gentleman has been pinching right and left for years—the pieces. Don't you know? This!"

Without looking up, he made the motion of counting money into the palm of his hand. She lowered her eyes slightly to observe this bit of pantomime, but returned them to his face at once. Then, in a mere breath:

"How do you know anything about him?" she asked, concealing her puzzled alarm. "What has it got to do with you?"

"Everything," was Ricardo's concise answer, in a low, emphatic whisper. He reflected that this girl was really his best hope. Out of the unfaded impression of past violence there was growing the sort of sentiment which prevents a man from being indifferent to a woman he has once held in his arms—if even against her will—and still more so if she has pardoned the outrage. It becomes then a sort of bond. He felt positively the need to confide

in her—a subtle trait of masculinity, this, almost physical, need of trust which can exist side by side with the most brutal readiness of suspicion.

"It's a game of grab—see?" he went on, with a new inflection of intimacy in his murmur. He was looking straight at her now. "That fat, tame slug of a gin-slinger, Schomberg, put us up to it."

So strong is the impression of helpless and persecuted misery, that the girl who had fought down a savage assault without faltering could not completely repress a shudder at the mere sound of the abhorred name.

Ricardo became more rapid and confidential.

"He wants to pay him off—pay both of you, at that; so he told me. He was hot after you. He would have given all he had into those hands of yours that have nearly strangled me. But you couldn't, eh? Nohow—what?" He paused. "So, rather than—you followed a gentleman?"

He noticed a slight movement of her head and spoke quickly.

"Same here—rather than be a wage-slave. Only these foreigners aren't to be trusted. You're too good for him. A man that will rob his best chum!" She raised her head. He went on, well pleased with his progress, whispering hurriedly: "Yes. I know all about him. So you may guess how he's likely to treat a woman after a bit!"

He did not know that he was striking terror into her breast now. Still the grey eyes remained fixed on him unmovably watchful, as if sleepy, under the white forehead. She was beginning to understand. His words conveyed a definite, dreadful meaning to her mind, which he proceeded to enlighten further in a convinced murmur.

"You and I are made to understand each other. Born alike, bred alike, I guess. You are not tame. Same here! You have been chucked out into this rotten world of 'yrporcrits. Same here!"

Her stillness, her appalled stillness, wore to him an air of fascinated attention. He asked abruptly:

"Where is it?"

She made an effort to breathe out:

"Where's what?"

His tone expressed excited secrecy.

"The swag—plunder—pieces. It's a game of grab. We must have it; but it isn't easy, and so you will have to lend a hand. Come! Is it kept in the house?"

As often with women, her wits were sharpened by the very terror of the glimpsed menace. She shook her head negatively.

"No."

"Sure?"

"Sure," she said.

"Ay! Thought so. Does your gentleman trust you?"

Again she shook her head.

"Blamed 'yrporcrit," he said feelingly, and then reflected: "He's one of the tame ones, ain't he?"

"You had better find out for yourself," she said.

"You trust me. I don't want to die before you and I have made friends." This was said with a strange air of feline gallantry. Then, tentatively: "But he could be brought to trust you, couldn't he?"

"Trust me?" she said, in a tone which bordered on despair, but which he mistook for derision.

"Stand in with us," he urged. "Give the chuck to all this blamed 'yrporcrisy. Perhaps, without being trusted, you have managed to find out something already, eh?"

"Perhaps I have," she uttered with lips that seemed to her to be freezing fast.

Ricardo now looked at her calm face with something like respect. He was even a little awed by her stillness, by her economy of words. Womanlike, she felt the effect she had produced, the effect of knowing much and of keeping all her knowledge in reserve. So far, somehow, this had come about of itself. Thus encouraged, directed in the way of duplicity, the refuge of the weak, she made a heroically conscious effort and forced her stiff, cold lips into a smile.

Duplicity—the refuge of the weak and the cowardly, but of the disarmed, too! Nothing stood between the enchanted dream of her existence and a cruel catastrophe

but her duplicity. It seemed to her that the man sitting there before her was an unavoidable presence, which had attended all her life. He was the embodied evil of the world. She was not ashamed of her duplicity. With a woman's frank courage, as soon as she saw that opening she threw herself into it without reserve, with only one doubt—that of her own strength. She was appalled by the situation; but already all her aroused femininity, understanding that whether Heyst loved her or not she loved him, and feeling that she had brought this on his head, faced the danger with a passionate desire to defend her own.

III

TO Ricardo the girl had been so unforeseen that he was unable to bring upon her the light of his critical faculties. Her smile appeared to him full of promise. He had not expected her to be what she was. Who, from the talk he had heard, could expect to meet a girl like this? She was a blooming miracle, he said to himself, familiarly, yet with a tinge of respect. She was no meat for the likes of that tame, respectable gin-slinger. Ricardo grew hot with indignation. Her courage, her physical strength, demonstrated at the cost of his discomfiture, commanded his sympathy. He felt himself drawn to her by the proofs of her amazing spirit. Such a girl! She had a strong soul; and her reflective disposition to throw over her connection proved that she was no hypocrite.

"Is your gentleman a good shot?" he said, looking down on the floor again, as if indifferent.

She hardly understood the phrase; but in its form it suggested some accomplishment. It was safe to whisper an affirmative.

"Yes."

"Mine, too—and better than good," Ricardo murmured, and then, in a confidential burst: "I am not so good at it, but I carry a pretty deadly thing about me, all the same!"

He tapped his leg. She was past the stage of shudders now. Stiff all over, unable even to move her eyes, she felt an awful mental tension which was like blank forgetfulness. Ricardo tried to influence her in his own way.

"And my gentleman is not the sort that would drop me. He ain't no foreigner: whereas you, with your baron, you don't know what's before you—or, rather, being a woman, you know only too well. Much better not to wait for the chuck. Pile in with us and get your share—of the plunder, I mean. You have some notion about it already."

She felt that if she as much as hinted by word or sign that there was no such thing on the island, Heyst's life wouldn't be worth half an hour's purchase; but all power of combining words had vanished in the tension of her mind. Words themselves were too difficult to think of—all except the word "yes." The saving word! She whispered it with not a feature of her face moving. To Ricardo the faint and concise sound proved a cool, reserved assent, more worth having from that amazing mistress of herself than a thousand words from any other woman. He thought with exultation that he had come upon one in a million—in ten millions! His whisper became frankly entreating.

"That's good! Now all you've got to do is to make sure where he keeps his swag. Only do be quick about it! I can't stand much longer this crawling-on-the-stomach business so as not to scare your gentleman. What do you think a fellow is—a reptile?"

She stared without seeing any one, as a person in the night sits staring and listening to deadly sounds, to evil incantations. And always in her head there was that tension of the mind trying to get hold of something, of a saving idea which seemed to be so near and could not be captured. Suddenly she seized it. Yes—she had to get that man out of the house. At that very moment, raised outside, not very near, but heard distinctly, Heyst's voice uttered the words:

"Have you been looking out for me, Wang?"

It was for her like a flash of lightning framed in the

darkness which had beset her on all sides, showing a deadly precipice right under her feet. With a convulsive movement she sat up straight, but had no power to rise. Ricardo, on the contrary, was on his feet on the instant, as noiseless as a cat. His yellow eyes gleamed, gliding here and there; but he, too, seemed unable to make another movement. Only his moustaches stirred visibly like the feelers of some animal.

Wang's answer, "*Ya tuan*," was heard by the two in the room, but more faintly. Then Heyst again:

"All right! You may bring the coffee in. Mem Putih out in the room yet?"

To this question Wang made no answer.

Ricardo's and the girl's eyes met, utterly without expression, all their faculties being absorbed in listening for the first sound of Heyst's footsteps, for any sound outside which would mean that Ricardo's retreat was cut off. Both understood perfectly well that Wang must have gone round the house, and that he was now at the back, making it impossible for Ricardo to slip out unseen that way before Heyst came in at the front.

A darkling shade settled on the face of the devoted secretary. Here was the business utterly spoiled! It was the gloom of anger, and even of apprehension. He would perhaps have made a dash for it through the back door, if Heyst had not been heard ascending the front steps. He climbed them slowly, very slowly, like a man who is discouraged or weary—or simply thoughtful; and Ricardo had a mental vision of his face, with its martial moustaches, the lofty forehead, the impassive features, and the quiet, meditative eyes. Trapped! Confound it! After all, perhaps the governor was right. Women had to be shunned. Fooling with this one had apparently ruined the whole business. For, trapped as he was, he might just as well kill, since, anyhow, to be seen was to be unmasked. But he was too fair-minded to be angry with the girl.

Heyst had paused on the veranda, or in the very doorway.

"I shall be shot down like a dog if I ain't quick," Ricardo muttered excitedly to the girl.

He stooped to get hold of his knife; and the next moment would have hurled himself out through the curtain, nearly as prompt and fully as deadly to Heyst as an unexpected thunderbolt. The feel more than the strength of the girl's hand, clutching at his shoulder, checked him. He swung round, crouching with a yellow upward glare. Ah! Was she turning against him?

He would have stuck his knife into the hollow of her bare throat if he had not seen her other hand pointing to the window. It was a long opening, high up, close under the ceiling almost, with a single pivoting shutter.

While he was still looking at it, she moved noiselessly away, picked up the overturned chair, and placed it under the wall. Then she looked round; but he didn't need to be beckoned to. In two long, tiptoeing strides he was at her side.

"Be quick!" she gasped.

He seized her hand and wrung it with all the force of his dumb gratitude, as a man does to a chum when there is no time for words. Then he mounted the chair. Ricardo was short—too short to get over without a noisy scramble. He hesitated an instant; she, watchful, bore rigidly on the seat with her beautiful bare arms, while, light and sure, he used the back of the chair as a ladder. The masses of her brown hair fell all about her face.

Footsteps resounded in the next room, and Heyst's voice, not very loud, called her by name.

"Lena!"

"Yes! In a minute," she answered with a particular intonation which she knew would prevent Heyst from coming in at once.

When she looked up, Ricardo had vanished, letting himself down outside so lightly that she had not heard the slightest noise. She stood up then, bewildered, frightened, as if awakened from a drugged sleep, with heavy, downcast, unseeing eyes, her fortitude tired out, her imagination as if dead within her and unable to keep her fear alive.

Heyst moved about aimlessly in the other room. This sound roused her exhausted wits. At once she began to think, hear, see; and what she saw—or rather recog-

nised, for her eyes had been resting on it all the time—was Ricardo's straw slipper, lost in the scuffle, lying near the bath. She had just time to step forward and plant her foot on it when the curtain shook, and, pushed aside, disclosed Heyst in the doorway.

Out of the appeased enchantment of the senses she had found with him, like a sort of bewitched state, his danger brought a sensation of warmth to her breast. She felt something stir in there, something profound, like a new sort of life.

The room was in partial darkness, Ricardo having accidentally swung the pivoted shutter as he went out of the window. Heyst peered from the doorway.

"Why, you haven't done your hair yet," he said.

"I won't stop to do it now. I shan't be long," she replied steadily, and remained still, feeling Ricardo's slipper under the sole of her foot.

Heyst, with a movement of retreat, let the curtain drop slowly. On the instant she stooped for the slipper, and, with it in her hand, spun round wildly, looking for some hiding-place; but there was no such spot in the bare room. The chest, the leather trunk, a dress or two of hers hanging on pegs—there was no place where the merest hazard might not guide Heyst's hand at any moment. Her wildly roaming eyes were caught by the half-closed window. She ran to it, and by raising herself on her toes was able to reach the shutter with her finger-tips. She pushed it square, stole back to the middle of the room, and, turning about, swung her arm, regulating the force of the throw so as not to let the slipper fly too far out and hit the edge of the overhanging eaves. It was a task of the nicest judgment for the muscles of those round arms, still quivering from the deadly wrestle with a man, for that brain, tense with the excitement of the situation and for the unstrung nerves flickering darkness before her eyes. At last the slipper left her hand. As soon as it passed the opening, it was out of her sight. She listened. She did not hear it strike anything; it just vanished, as if it had wings to fly on through the air. Not a sound! It had gone clear.

Her valiant arms hanging close against her side, she stood as if turned into stone. A faint whistle reached her ears. The forgetful Ricardo, becoming very much aware of his loss, had been hanging about in great anxiety, which was relieved by the appearance of the slipper flying from under the eaves; and now, thoughtfully, he had ventured a whistle to put her mind at ease.

Suddenly the girl reeled forward. She saved herself from a fall only by embracing with both arms one of the tall, roughly carved posts holding the mosquito-net above the bed. For a long time she clung to it, with her forehead leaning against the wood. One side of her loosened sarong had slipped down as low as her hip. The long brown tresses of her hair fell in lank wisps, as if wet, almost black against her white body. Her uncovered flank, damp with the sweat of anguish and fatigue, gleamed coldly with the immobility of polished marble in the hot, diffused light falling through the window above her head —a dim reflection of the consuming, passionate blaze of sunshine outside, all aquiver with the effort to set the earth on fire, to burn it to ashes.

IV

HEYST, seated at the table with his chin on his breast, raised his head at the faint rustle of Lena's dress. He was startled by the dead pallor of her cheeks, by something lifeless in her eyes, which looked at him strangely, without recognition. But to his anxious inquiries she answered reassuringly that there was nothing the matter with her, really. She had felt giddy on rising. She had even had a moment of faintness, after her bath. She had to sit down to wait for it to pass. This had made her late dressing.

"I didn't try to do my hair. I didn't want to keep you waiting any longer," she said.

He was unwilling to press her with questions about her health, since she seemed to make light of this indis-

position. She had not done her hair, but she had brushed it, and had tied it with a ribbon behind. With her forehead uncovered, she looked very young, almost a child, a careworn child ; a child with something on its mind.

What surprised Heyst was the non-appearance of Wang. The Chinaman had always materialised at the precise moment of his service, neither too soon nor too late. This time the usual miracle failed. What was the meaning of this ?

Heyst raised his voice—a thing he disliked doing. It was promptly answered from the compound :

"*Ada tuan !*"

Lena, leaning on her elbow, with her eyes on her plate, did not seem to hear anything. When Wang entered with a tray, his narrow eyes, tilted inward by the prominence of salient cheekbones, kept her under stealthy observation all the time. Neither the one nor the other of that white couple paid the slightest attention to him, and he withdrew without having heard them exchange a single word. He squatted on his heels on the back veranda. His Chinaman's mind, very clear but not far-reaching, was made up according to the plain reason of things, such as it appeared to him in the light of his simple feeling for self-preservation, untrammelled by any notions of romantic honour or tender conscience. His yellow hands, lightly clasped, hung idly between his knees. The graves of Wang's ancestors were far away, his parents were dead, his elder brother was a soldier in the yamen of some Mandarin away in Formosa. No one near by had a claim on his veneration or his obedience. He had been for years a labouring, restless vagabond. His only tie in the world was the Alfuro woman, in exchange for whom he had given away some considerable part of his hard-earned substance ; and his duty, in reason, could be to no one but himself.

The scuffle behind the curtain was a thing of bad augury for that Number One for whom the Chinaman had neither love nor dislike. He had been awed enough by that development to hang back with the coffee-pot till at last the white man was induced to call him in. Wang went

in with curiosity. Certainly, the white woman looked as if she had been wrestling with a spirit, which had managed to tear half her blood out of her before letting her go. As to the man, Wang had long looked upon him as being in some sort bewitched; and now he was doomed. He heard their voices in the room. Heyst was urging the girl to go and lie down again. He was extremely concerned. She had eaten nothing.

"The best thing for you. You really must!"

She sat listless, shaking her head from time to time negatively, as if nothing could be any good. But he insisted; she saw the beginning of wonder in his eyes, and suddenly gave way.

"Perhaps I had better."

She did not want to arouse his wonder, which would lead him straight to suspicion. He must not suspect!

Already, with the consciousness of her love for this man, of that something rapturous and profound going beyond the mere embrace, there was born in her a woman's innate mistrust of masculinity, of that seductive strength allied to an absurd, delicate shrinking from the recognition of the naked necessity of facts, which never yet frightened a woman worthy of the name. She had no plan; but her mind, quieted down somewhat by the very effort to preserve outward composure for his sake, perceived that her behaviour had secured, at any rate, a short period of safety. Perhaps because of the similarity of their miserable origin in the dregs of mankind, she had understood Ricardo perfectly. He would keep quiet for a time now. In this momentarily soothing certitude her bodily fatigue asserted itself, the more overpoweringly since its cause was not so much the demand on her strength as the awful suddenness of the stress she had had to meet. She would have tried to overcome it from the mere instinct of resistance, if it had not been for Heyst's alternate pleadings and commands. Before this eminently masculine fussing she felt the woman's need to give way, the sweetness of surrender.

"I will do anything you like," she said.

Getting up, she was surprised by a wave of languid

weakness that came over her, embracing and enveloping her like warm water, with a noise in her ears as of a breaking sea.

"You must help me along," she added quickly.

While he put his arm round her waist—not by any means an uncommon thing for him to do—she found a special satisfaction in the feeling of being thus sustained. She abandoned all her weight to that encircling and protecting pressure, while a thrill went through her at the sudden thought that it was she who would have to protect him, to be the defender of a man who was strong enough to lift her bodily, as he was doing even then in his two arms. For Heyst had done this as soon as they had crept through the doorway of the room. He thought it was quicker and simpler to carry her the last step or two. He had grown really too anxious to be aware of the effort. He lifted her high and deposited her on the bed, as one lays a child on its side in a cot. Then he sat down on the edge, masking his concern with a smile which obtained no response from the dreamy immobility of her eyes. But she sought his hand, seized it eagerly; and while she was pressing it with all the force of which she was capable, the sleep she needed overtook her suddenly, overwhelmingly, as it overtakes a child in a cot, with her lips parted for a safe, endearing word which she had thought of but had no time to utter.

The usual flaming silence brooded over Samburan.

"What in the world is this new mystery?" murmured Heyst to himself, contemplating her deep slumber.

It was so deep, this enchanted sleep, that when some time afterward he gently tried to open her fingers and free his hand, he succeeded without provoking the slightest stir.

"There is some very simple explanation, no doubt," he thought, as he stole out into the living-room.

Absent-mindedly he pulled a book out of the top shelf, and sat down with it; but even after he had opened it on his knee, and had been staring at the pages for a time, he had not the slightest idea of what it was about. He stared and stared at the crowded, parallel lines. It was

only when, raising his eyes for no particular reason, he saw Wang standing motionless on the other side of the table, that he regained complete control of his faculties.

"Oh, yes," he said, as if suddenly reminded of a forgotten appointment of a not particularly welcome sort.

He waited a little, and then, with reluctant curiosity, forced himself to ask the silent Wang what he had to say. He had some idea that the matter of the vanished revolver would come up at last; but the guttural sounds which proceeded from the Chinaman did not refer to that delicate subject. His speech was concerned with cups, saucers, plates, forks, and knives. All these things had been put away in the cupboards on the back veranda, where they belonged, perfectly clean, "all plopel." Heyst wondered at the scrupulosity of a man who was about to abandon him; for he was not surprised to hear Wang conclude the account of his stewardship with the words:

"I go now."

"Oh! You go now?" said Heyst, leaning back, his book on his knees.

"Yes. Me no likee. One man, two man, thlee man—no can do! Me go now."

"What's frightening you away like this?" asked Heyst, while through his mind flashed the hope that something enlightening might come from that being so unlike himself, taking contact with the world with a simplicity and directness of which his own mind was not capable. "Why?" he went on. "You are used to white men. You know them well."

"Yes. Me savee them," assented Wang inscrutably. "Me savee plenty."

All that he really knew was his own mind. He had made it up to withdraw himself and the Alfuro woman from the uncertainties of the relations which were going to establish themselves between those white men. It was Pedro who had been the first cause of Wang's suspicion and fear. The Chinaman had seen wild men. He had penetrated, in the train of a Chinese pedlar, up one or two of the Bornean rivers into the country of the Dyaks. He had also been in the interior of Mindanao, where there are

people who live in trees—savages, no better than animals; but a hairy brute like Pedro, with his great fangs and ferocious growls, was altogether beyond his conception of anything that could be looked upon as human. The strong impression made on him by Pedro was the prime inducement which had led Wang to purloin the revolver. Reflection on the general situation, and on the insecurity of Number One, came later, after he had obtained possession of the revolver and of the box of cartridges out of the table drawer in the living-room.

"Oh, you savee plenty about white men," Heyst went on in a slightly bantering tone, after a moment of silent reflection in which he had confessed to himself that the recovery of the revolver was not to be thought of, either by persuasion or by some more forcible means. "You speak in that fashion, but you are frightened of those white men over there!"

"Me no flightened," protested Wang raucously, throwing up his head—which gave to his throat a more strained, anxious appearance than ever. "Me no likee," he added in a quieter tone. "Me velly sick."

He put his hand over the region under the breastbone "That," said Heyst, serenely positive, "belong one piecee lie. That isn't proper man-talk at all. And after stealing my revolver, too!"

He had suddenly decided to speak about it, because his frankness could not make the situation much worse than it was. He did not suppose for a moment that Wang had the revolver anywhere about his person; and after having thought the matter over, he had arrived at the conclusion that the Chinaman never meant to use the weapon against him. After a slight start, because the direct charge had taken him unawares, Wang tore open the front of his jacket with a convulsive show of indignation.

"No hab got. Look see!" he mouthed in pretended anger.

He slapped his bare chest violently; he uncovered his very ribs, all astir with the panting of outraged virtue; his smooth stomach heaved with indignation. He started

his wide blue breeches flapping about his yellow calves. Heyst watched him quietly.

"I never said you had it on you," he observed, without raising his voice; "but the revolver is gone from where I kept it."

"Me no savee levolvel," Wang said obstinately.

The book lying open on Heyst's knee slipped suddenly, and he made a sharp movement to catch it up. Wang was unable to see the reason of this because of the table, and leaped away from what seemed to him a threatening symptom. When Heyst looked up, the Chinaman was already at the door facing the room, not frightened, but alert.

"What's the matter?" asked Heyst.

Wang nodded his shaven head significantly at the curtain closing the doorway of the bedroom.

"Me no likee," he repeated.

"What the devil do you mean?" Heyst was genuinely amazed. "Don't like what?"

Wang pointed a long, lemon-coloured finger at the motionless folds.

"Two," he said.

"Two what? I don't understand."

"Suppose you savee, you no like that fashion. Me savee plenty. Me go now."

Heyst had risen from his chair, but Wang kept his ground in the doorway for a little while longer. His almond-shaped eyes imparted to his face an expression of soft and sentimental melancholy. The muscles of his throat moved visibly while he uttered a distinct and guttural "Good-bye," and vanished from Number One's sight.

The Chinaman's departure altered the situation. Heyst reflected on what would be best to do in view of that fact. For a long time he hesitated; then, shrugging his shoulders wearily, he walked out on the veranda, down the steps, and continued at a steady gait, with a thoughtful mien, in the direction of his guests' bungalow. He wanted to make an important communication to them, and he had no other object—least of all to give them the shock of a

surprise call. Nevertheless, their brutish henchman not being on watch, it was Heyst's fate to startle Mr. Jones and his secretary by his sudden appearance in the doorway. Their conversation must have been very interesting to prevent them from hearing the visitor's approach. In the dim room—the shutters were kept constantly closed against the heat—Heyst saw them start apart. It was Mr. Jones who spoke!

"Ah, here you are again! Come in, come in!"

Heyst, taking his hat off in the doorway, entered the room.

V

WAKING up suddenly, Lena looked, without raising her head from the pillow, at the room in which she was alone. She got up quickly, as if to counteract the awful sinking of her heart by the vigorous use of her limbs. But this sinking was only momentary. Mistress of herself from pride, from love, from necessity, and also because of a woman's vanity in self-sacrifice, she met Heyst, returning from the strangers' bungalow, with a clear glance and a smile.

The smile he managed to answer; but, noticing that he avoided her eyes, she composed her lips and lowered her gaze. For the same reason she hastened to speak to him in a tone of indifference, which she put on without effort, as if she had grown adept in duplicity since sunrise.

"You have been over there again?"

"I have. I thought—but you had better know first that we have lost Wang for good."

She repeated "For good?" as if she had not understood.

"For good or evil—I shouldn't know which if you were to ask me. He has dismissed himself. He's gone."

"You expected him to go, though, didn't you?"

Heyst sat down on the other side of the table.

"Yes. I expected it as soon as I discovered that he had annexed my revolver. He says he hasn't taken it.

That's of course. A Chinaman would not see the sense of confessing under any circumstances. To deny any charge is a principle of right conduct; but he hardly expected to be believed. He was a little enigmatic at the last, Lena. He startled me."

Heyst paused. The girl seemed absorbed in her own thoughts.

"He startled me," repeated Heyst. She noted the anxiety in his tone, and turned her head slightly to look at him across the table.

"It must have been something—to startle *you*," she said. In the depth of her parted lips, like a ripe pomegranate, there was a gleam of white teeth.

"It was only a single word—and some of his gestures. He had been making a good deal of noise. I wonder we didn't wake you up. How soundly you can sleep! I say, do you feel all right now?"

"As fresh as can be," she said, treating him to another deep gleam of a smile. "I heard no noise, and I'm glad of it. The way he talks in his harsh voice frightens me. I don't like all these foreign people."

"It was just before he went away—bolted out, I should say. He nodded and pointed at the curtain of our room. He knew you were there, of course. He seemed to think—he seemed to try to give me to understand that you were in special—well, danger. You know how he talks."

She said nothing; she made no sound, only the faint tinge of colour ebbed out of her cheek

"Yes," Heyst went on. "He seemed to try to warn me. That must have been it. Did he imagine I had forgotten your existence? The only word he said was 'two.' It sounded so, at least. Yes, 'two'—and that he didn't like it."

"What does that mean?" she whispered.

"We know what the word two means, don't we, Lena? We are two. Never were such a lonely two out of the world, my dear! He might have tried to remind me that he himself has a woman to look after. Why are you so pale, Lena?"

"Am I pale?" she asked negligently.

"You are." Heyst was really anxious.

"Well, it isn't from fright," she protested truthfully.

Indeed, what she felt was a sort of horror which left her absolutely in the full possession of all her faculties; more difficult to bear, perhaps, for that reason, but not paralysing to her fortitude.

Heyst in his turn smiled at her.

"I really don't know that there is any reason to be frightened."

"I mean I am not frightened for myself."

"I believe you are very plucky," he said. The colour had returned to her face. "I," continued Heyst, "am so rebellious to outward impressions that I can't say that much about myself. I don't react with sufficient distinctness." He changed his tone. "You know I went to see those men first thing this morning."

"I know. Be careful!" she murmured.

"I wonder how one can be careful! I had a long talk with—but I don't believe you have seen them. One of them is a fantastically thin, long person, apparently ailing; I shouldn't wonder if he were really so. He makes rather a point of it in a mysterious manner. I imagine he must have suffered from tropical fevers, but not so much as he tries to make out. He's what people would call a gentleman. He seemed on the point of volunteering a tale of his adventures—for which I didn't ask him—but remarked that it was a long story; some other time, perhaps.

"'I suppose you would like to know who I am?' he asked me.

"I told him I would leave it to him, in a tone which, between gentlemen, could have left no doubt in his mind. He raised himself on his elbow—he was lying down on the camp-bed—and said:

"'I am he who is—'"

Lena seemed not to be listening; but when Heyst paused, she turned her head quickly to him. He took it for a movement of inquiry, but in this he was wrong. A great vagueness enveloped her impressions, but all her

energy was concentrated on the struggle that she wanted to take upon herself, in a great exaltation of love and self-sacrifice, which is woman's sublime faculty; altogether on herself, every bit of it, leaving him nothing, not even the knowledge of what she did, if that were possible. She would have liked to lock him up by some stratagem. Had she known of some means to put him to sleep for days she would have used incantations or philtres without misgivings. He seemed to her too good for such contacts, and not sufficiently equipped. This last feeling had nothing to do with the material fact of the revolver being stolen. She could hardly appreciate that fact at its full value.

Observing her eyes fixed and as if sightless—for the concentration on her purpose took all expression out of them—Heyst imagined it to be the effect of a great mental effort.

"No use asking me what he meant, Lena; I don't know, and I did not ask him. The gentleman, as I have told you before, seems devoted to mystification. I said nothing, and he laid down his head again on the bundle of rugs he uses for a pillow. He affects a state of great weakness, but I suspect that he's perfectly capable of leaping to his feet if he likes. Having been ejected, he said, from his proper social sphere because he had refused to conform to certain usual conventions, he was a rebel now, and was coming and going up and down the earth. As I really did not want to listen to all this nonsense, I told him that I had heard that sort of story about somebody else before. His grin is really ghastly. He confessed that I was very far from the sort of man he expected to meet. Then he said:

"'As to me, I am no blacker than the gentleman you are thinking of, and I have neither more nor less determination.'"

Heyst looked across the table at Lena. Propped on her elbows, and holding her head in both hands, she moved it a little with an air of understanding.

"Nothing could be plainer, eh?" said Heyst grimly. "Unless, indeed, this is his idea of a pleasant joke; for,

when he finished speaking, he burst into a long, loud laugh. I didn't join him!"

"I wish you had," she breathed out.

"I didn't join him. It did not occur to me. I am not much of a diplomatist. It would probably have been wise; for, indeed, I believe he had said more than he meant to say, and was trying to take it back by this affected jocularity. Yet, when one thinks of it, diplomacy without force in the background is but a rotten reed to lean upon. And I don't know whether I could have done it if I had thought of it. I don't know. It would have been against the grain. Could I have done it? I have lived too long within myself, watching the mere shadows and shades of life. To deceive a man on some issue which could be decided quicker by his destruction while one is disarmed, helpless, without even the power to run away—no! *That* seems to me too degrading. And yet I have you here! I have your very existence in my keeping. What do you say, Lena? Would I be capable of throwing you to the lions to save my dignity?"

She got up, walked quickly round the table, posed herself on his knees lightly, throwing one arm round his neck, and whispered in his ear:

"You may, if you like. And may be that's the only way I would consent to leave you. For something like that. If it were something no bigger than your little finger."

She gave him a light kiss on the lips and was gone before he could detain her. She regained her seat and propped her elbows again on the table. It was hard to believe that she had moved from the spot at all. The fleeting weight of her body on his knees, the hug round his neck, the whisper in his ear, the kiss on his lips, might have been the unsubstantial sensations of a dream invading the reality of waking life; a sort of charming mirage in the barren aridity of his thoughts. He hesitated to speak till she said, business-like:

"Well. And what then?"

Heyst gave a start.

"Oh, yes. I didn't join him. I let him have his laugh out by himself. He was shaking all over, like a merry

skeleton, under a cotton sheet he was covered with—I believe in order to conceal the revolver that he had in his right hand. I didn't see it, but I have a distinct impression it was there in his fist. As he had not been looking at me for some time, but staring into a certain part of the room, I turned my head and saw a hairy, wild sort of creature which they take about with them, squatting on its heels in the angle of the walls behind me. He wasn't there when I came in. I didn't like the notion of that watchful monster behind my back. If I had been less at their mercy, I should certainly have changed my position. As things are now, to move would have been a mere weakness. So I remained where I was. The gentleman on the bed said he could assure me of one thing; and that was that his presence here was no more morally reprehensible than mine.

"'We pursue the same ends,' he said, 'only perhaps I pursue them with more openness than you—with more simplicity.'

"That's what he said," Heyst went on, after looking at Lena in a sort of inquiring silence. "I asked him if he knew beforehand that I was living here; but he only gave me a ghastly grin. I didn't press him for an answer, Lena. I thought I had better not."

On her smooth forehead a ray of light always seemed to rest. Her loose hair, parted in the middle, covered the hands sustaining her head. She seemed spell-bound by the interest of the narrative. Heyst did not pause long. He managed to continue his relation smoothly enough, beginning afresh with a piece of comment.

"He would have lied impudently—and I detest being told a lie. It makes me uncomfortable. It's pretty clear that I am not fitted for the affairs of the wide world. But I did not want him to think that I accepted his presence too meekly; so I said that his comings or goings on the earth were none of my business, of course, except that I had a natural curiosity to know when he would find it convenient to resume them.

"He asked me to look at the state he was in. Had I been all alone here, as they think I am, I should have

laughed at him. But not being alone—I say, Lena, you are sure you haven't shown yourself where you could be seen ? "

" Certain," she said promptly.

He looked relieved.

" You understand, Lena, that when I ask you to keep so strictly out of sight, it is because you are not for them to look at—to talk about. My poor Lena ! I can't help that feeling. Do you understand it ? "

She moved her head slightly in a manner that was neither affirmative nor negative.

" People will have to see me some day," she said.

" I wonder how long it will be possible for you to keep out of sight ! " murmured Heyst thoughtfully. He bent over the table. " Let me finish telling you. I asked him pointblank what it was he wanted with me ; he appeared extremely unwilling to come to the point. It was not really so pressing as all that, he said. His secretary, who was in fact his partner, was not present, having gone down to the wharf to look at their boat. Finally the fellow proposed that he should put off a certain communication he had to make till the day after to-morrow. I agreed ; but I also told him that I was not at all anxious to hear it. I had no conception in what way his affairs could concern me.

" ' Ah, Mr. Heyst,' he said, ' you and I have much more in common than you think.' "

Heyst struck the table with his fist unexpectedly.

" It was a jeer ; I am sure it was ! "

He seemed ashamed of this outburst and smiled faintly into the motionless eyes of the girl.

" What could I have done—even if I had had my pockets full of revolvers ? "

She made an appreciative sign.

" Killing's a sin, sure enough," she murmured.

" I went away," Heyst continued. " I left him there, lying on his side with his eyes shut. When I got back here, I found you looking ill. What was it, Lena ? You did give me a scare ! Then I had the interview with Wang while you rested. You were sleeping quietly. I sat here

to consider all these things calmly, to try to penetrate their inner meaning and their outward bearing. It struck me that the two days we have before us have the character of a sort of truce. The more I thought of it, the more I felt that this was tacitly understood between Jones and myself. It was to our advantage, if anything can be of advantage to people caught so completely unawares as we are. Wang was gone. He, at any rate, had declared himself, but as I did not know what he might take it into his head to do, I thought I had better warn these people that I was no longer responsible for the Chinaman. I did not want Mr. Wang making some move which would precipitate the action against us. Do you see my point of view?"

She made a sign that she did. All her soul was wrapped in her passionate determination, in an exalted belief in herself—in the contemplation of her amazing opportunity to win the certitude, the eternity, of that man's love.

"I never saw two men," Heyst was saying, "more affected by a piece of information than Jones and his secretary, who was back in the bungalow by then. They had not heard me come up. I told them I was sorry to intrude.

"'Not at all! Not at all,' said Jones.

"The secretary backed away into a corner and watched me like a wary cat. In fact, they both were visibly on their guard.

"'I am come,' I told them, 'to let you know that my servant has deserted—gone off.'

"At first they looked at each other as if they had not understood what I was saying; but very soon they seemed quite concerned.

"'You mean to say your Chink's cleared out?' said Ricardo, coming forward from his corner. 'Like this—all at once? What did he do it for?'

"I said that a Chinaman had always a simple and precise reason for what he did, but that to get such a reason out of him was not so easy. All he had told me, I said, was that he 'didn't like.'

"They looked extremely disturbed at this. Didn't like what, they wanted to know.

"'The looks of you and your party,' I told Jones.

"'Nonsense!' he cried out; and immediately Ricardo, the short man, struck in.

"'Told you *that*? What did he take you for, sir—an infant? Or do you take us for kids?—meaning no offence. Come, I bet you will tell us next that you've missed something.'

"'I didn't mean to tell you anything of the sort,' I said, 'but as a matter of fact it is so.'

"He slapped his thigh.

"'Thought so. What do you think of this trick, governor?'

"Jones made some sort of sign to him, and then that extraordinary cat-faced associate proposed that he and their servant should come out and help me to catch or kill the Chink.

"My object, I said, was not to get assistance. I did not intend to chase the Chinaman. I had come only to warn them that he was armed, and that he really objected to their presence on the island. I wanted them to understand that I was not responsible for anything that might happen.

"'Do you mean to tell us,' asked Ricardo, 'that there is a crazy Chink with a six-shooter broke loose on this island, and that you don't care?'

"Strangely enough, they did not seem to believe my story. They were exchanging significant looks all the time. Ricardo stole up close to his principal; they had a confabulation together, and then something happened which I did not expect. It's rather awkward, too.

"Since I would not have their assistance to get hold of the Chink and recover my property, the least they could do was to send me their servant. It was Jones who said that, and Ricardo backed up the idea.

"'Yes, yes—let our Pedro cook for all hands in your compound. He isn't so bad as he looks. That's what we will do!'

"He bustled out of the room to the veranda, and let out

an air-splitting whistle for their Pedro. Having heard the brute's answering howl, Ricardo ran back into the room.

"'Yes, Mr. Heyst. This will do capitally, Mr. Heyst. You just direct him to do whatever you are accustomed to have done for you in the way of attendance. See?'

"Lena, I confess to you that I was taken completely by surprise. I had not expected anything of the sort. I don't know what I expected. I am so anxious about you that I can't keep away from these infernal scoundrels. And only two months ago I would not have cared. I would have defied their scoundrelism as much as I have scorned all the other intrusions of life. But now I have you! You stole into my life, and—"

Heyst drew a deep breath. The girl gave him a quick, wide-eyed glance.

"Ah! That's what you are thinking of—that you have me!"

It was impossible to read the thoughts veiled by her steady grey eyes, to penetrate the meaning of her silences, her words, and even her embraces. He used to come out of her very arms with the feeling of a baffled man.

"If I haven't you, if you are not here, then where are you?" cried Heyst. "You understand me very well!"

She shook her head a little. Her red lips, at which he looked now, her lips as fascinating as the voice that came out of them, uttered the words:

"I hear what you say; but what does it mean?"

"It means that I could lie and perhaps cringe for your sake."

"No! No! Don't you ever do that," she said in haste, while her eyes glistened suddenly. "You would hate me for it afterwards!"

"Hate you?" repeated Heyst, who had recalled his polite manner. "No! You needn't consider the extremity of the improbable—as yet. But I will confess to you that I—how shall I call it?—that I dissembled. First I dissembled my dismay at the unforeseen result of my idiotic diplomacy. Do you understand, my dear girl?"

It was evident that she did not understand the word.

Heyst produced his playful smile, which contrasted oddly with the worried character of his whole expression. His temples seemed to have sunk in, his face looked a little leaner.

"A diplomatic statement, Lena, is a statement of which everything is true but the sentiment which seems to prompt it. I have never been diplomatic in my relation with mankind—not from regard for its feelings, but from a certain regard for my own. Diplomacy doesn't go well with consistent contempt. I cared little for life and still less for death."

"Don't talk like that!"

"I dissembled my extreme longing to take these wandering scoundrels by their throats," he went on. "I have only two hands—I wish I had a hundred to defend you—and there were three throats. By that time their Pedro was in the room too. Had he seen me engaged with their two throats, he would have been at mine like a fierce dog, or any other savage and faithful brute. I had no difficulty in dissembling my longing for the vulgar, stupid, and hopeless argument of fight. I remarked that I really did not want a servant. I couldn't think of depriving them of their man's services; but they would not hear me. They had made up their minds.

"'We shall send him over at once,' Ricardo said, 'to start cooking dinner for everybody. I hope you won't mind me coming to eat it with you in your bungalow; and we will send the governor's dinner over to him here.'

"I could no nothing but hold my tongue or bring on a quarrel—some manifestation of their dark purpose, which we have no means to resist. Of course, you may remain invisible this evening; but with that atrocious brute prowling all the time at the back of the house, how long can your presence be concealed from these men?"

Heyst's distress could be felt in his silence. The girl's head, sustained by her hands buried in the thick masses of her hair, had a perfect immobility.

"You are certain you have not been seen so far?" he asked suddenly.

The motionless head spoke.

"How can I be certain? You told me you wanted me to keep out of the way. I kept out of the way. I didn't ask your reason. I thought you didn't want people to know that you had a girl like me about you."

"What? Ashamed?" cried Heyst.

"It isn't what's right, perhaps—I mean for you—is it?"

Heyst lifted his hands, reproachfully courteous.

"I look upon it as so very much right that I couldn't bear the idea of any other than sympathetic, respectful eyes resting on you. I disliked and mistrusted these fellows from the first. Didn't you understand?"

"Yes; I did keep out of sight," she said.

A silence fell. At last Heyst stirred slightly.

"All this is of very little importance now," he said with a sigh. "This is a question of something infinitely worse than mere looks and thoughts, however base and contemptible. As I have told you, I met Ricardo's suggestions by silence. As I was turning away he said:

"'If you happen to have the key of that storeroom of yours on you, Mr. Heyst, you may just as well let me have it; I will give it to our Pedro.'

"I had it on me, and I tendered it to him without speaking. The hairy creature was at the door by then, and caught the key, which Ricardo threw to him, better than any trained ape could have done. I came away. All the time I had been thinking anxiously of you, whom I had left asleep, alone here, and apparently ill."

Heyst interrupted himself, with a listening turn of his head. He had heard the faint sound of sticks being snapped in the compound. He rose and crossed the room to look out of the back door.

"And here the creature is," he said, returning to the table. "Here he is, already attending to the fire. Oh, my dear Lena!"

She had followed him with her eyes. She watched him go out on the front veranda cautiously. He lowered stealthily a couple of screens that hung between the columns, and remained outside very still, as if interested by something on the open ground. Meantime she had

risen in her turn, to take a peep into the compound. Heyst, glancing over his shoulder, saw her returning to her seat. He beckoned to her, and she continued to move, crossing the shady room, pure and bright in her white dress, her hair loose, with something of a sleep-walker in her unhurried motion, in her extended hand, in the sightless effect of her grey eyes luminous in the half light. He had never seen such an expression in her face before. It had dreaminess in it, intense attention, and something like sternness. Arrested in the doorway by Heyst's extended arm, she seemed to wake up, flushed faintly—and this flush, passing off, carried away with it the strange transfiguring mood. With a courageous gesture she pushed back the heavy masses of her hair. The light clung to her forehead. Her delicate nostrils quivered. Heyst seized her arm and whispered excitedly:

"Slip out here, quickly! The screens will conceal you. Only you must mind the stair-space. They are actually out—I mean the other two. You had better see them before you—"

She made a barely perceptible movement of recoil, checked at once, and stood still. Heyst released her arm.

"Yes, perhaps I had better," she said with unnatural deliberation, and stepped out on the veranda to stand close by his side.

Together, one on each side of the screen, they peeped between the edge of the canvas and the veranda-post entwined with creepers. A great heat ascended from the sun-smitten ground, in an ever-rising wave, as if from some secret store of earth's fiery heart; for the sky was growing cooler already, and the sun had declined sufficiently for the shadows of Mr. Jones and his henchman to be projected toward the bungalow side by side—one infinitely slender, the other short and broad.

The two visitors stood still and gazed. To keep up the fiction of his invalidism, Mr. Jones, the gentleman, leaned on the arm of Ricardo, the secretary, the top of whose hat just came up to his governor's shoulder.

"Do you see them?" Heyst whispered into the girl's

ear. "Here they are, the envoys of the outer world. Here they are before you—evil intelligence, instinctive savagery, arm in arm. The brute force is at the back. A trio of fitting envoys perhaps—but what about the welcome? Suppose I were armed, could I shoot those two down where they stand? Could I?"

Without moving her head, the girl felt for Heyst's hand, pressed it, and thereafter did not let it go. He continued, bitterly playful:

"I don't know. I don't think so. There is a strain in me which lays me under an insensate obligation to avoid even the appearance of murder. I have never pulled a trigger or lifted my hand on a man, even in self-defence."

The suddenly tightened grip of her hand checked him.

"They are making a move," she murmured.

"Can they be thinking of coming here?" Heyst wondered anxiously.

"No, they aren't coming this way," she said; and there was another pause. "They are going back to their house," she reported finally.

After watching them a little longer, she let go Heyst's hand and moved away from the screen. He followed her into the room.

"You have seen them now," he began. "Think what it was to me to see them land in the dusk, fantasms from the sea—apparitions, chimæras! And they persist. That's the worst of it—they persist. They have no right to be—but they are. They ought to have aroused my fury. But I have refined everything away by this time—anger, indignation, scorn itself. Nothing's left but disgust. Since you have told me of that abominable calumny, it has become immense—it extends even to myself." He looked up at her.

"But luckily I have you. And if only Wang had not carried off that miserable revolver—yes, Lena, here we are, we two!"

She put both her hands on his shoulders and looked straight into his eyes. He returned her penetrating gaze. It baffled him. He could not pierce the grey veil of her

eyes; but the sadness of her voice thrilled him profoundly.

"You are not reproaching me?" she asked slowly.

"Reproach? What a word between us! It could only be myself—but the mention of Wang has given me an idea. I have been, not exactly cringing, not exactly lying, but still dissembling. You have been hiding yourself, to please me, but still you have been hiding. All this is very dignified. Why shouldn't we try begging now? A noble art! Yes, Lena, we must go out together. I couldn't think of leaving you alone, and I must—yes, I must speak to Wang. We shall go and seek that man, who knows what he wants and how to secure what he wants. We will go at once!"

"Wait till I put my hair up," she agreed instantly, and vanished behind the curtain.

When the curtain had fallen behind her, she turned her head back with an expression of infinite and tender concern for him—for him whom she could never hope to understand, and whom she was afraid she could never satisfy; as if her passion were of a hopelessly lower quality, unable to appease some exalted and delicate desire of his superior soul. In a couple of minutes she reappeared. They left the house by the door of the compound, and passed within three feet of the thunderstruck Pedro, without even looking in his direction. He rose from stooping over a fire of sticks, and, balancing himself clumsily, uncovered his enormous fangs in gaping astonishment. Then suddenly he set off rolling on his bandy legs to impart to his masters the astonishing discovery of a woman.

VI

As luck would have it, Ricardo was lounging alone on the veranda of the former counting-house. He scented some new development at once, and ran down to meet the trotting, bear-like figure. The deep, growling noises it made, though they had only a very remote resemblance to the Spanish language, or indeed to any

sort of human speech, were from long practice quite intelligible to Mr. Jones's secretary. Ricardo was rather surprised. He had imagined that the girl would continue to keep out of sight. That line apparently was given up. He did not mistrust her. How could he? Indeed, he could not think of her existence calmly.

He tried to keep her image out of his mind so that he should be able to use its powers with some approach to that coolness which the complex nature of the situation demanded from him, both for his own sake and as the faithful follower of plain Mr. Jones, gentleman.

He collected his wits and thought. This was a change of policy, probably on the part of Heyst. If so, what could it mean? A deep fellow! Unless it was her doing; in which case—h'm—all right! Must be. She would know what she was doing. Before him Pedro, lifting his feet alternately, swayed to and fro sideways—his usual attitude of expectation. His little red eyes, lost in the mass of hair, were motionless. Ricardo stared into them with calculated contempt and said in a rough, angry voice:

"Woman! Of course there is. We know that without you!" He gave the tame monster a push. "Git! *Vamos!* Waddle! Get back and cook the dinner! Which way did they go, then?"

Pedro extended a huge, hairy forearm to show the direction, and went off on his bandy legs. Advancing a few steps, Ricardo was just in time to see, above some bushes, two white helmets moving side by side in the clearing. They disappeared. Now that he had managed to keep Pedro from informing the governor that there was a woman on the island, he could indulge in speculation as to the movements of these people. His attitude towards Mr. Jones had undergone a spiritual change, of which he himself was not yet fully aware.

That morning, before tiffin, after his escape from the Heyst bungalow, completed in such an inspiring way by the recovery of the slipper, Ricardo had made his way to their allotted house, reeling as he ran, his head in a whirl. He was wildly excited by visions of inconceivable

promise. He waited to compose himself before he dared to meet the governor. On entering the room, he found Mr. Jones sitting on the camp bedstead like a tailor on his board, cross-legged, his long back against the wall.

"I say, sir! You aren't going to tell me you are bored?"

"Bored? No! Where the devil have you been all this time?"

"Observing—watching—nosing around. What else? I knew you had company. Have you talked freely, sir?"

"Yes, I have," muttered Mr. Jones.

"Not downright plain, sir?"

"No. I wished you had been here. You loaf all the morning, and now you come in out of breath. What's the matter?"

"I haven't been wasting my time out there," said Ricardo. "Nothing's the matter. I—I—might have hurried a bit." He was in truth still panting; only it was not with running, but with the tumult of thoughts and sensations long repressed, which had been set free by the adventure of the morning. He was almost distracted by them now. He forgot himself in the maze of possibilities threatening and inspiring. "And so you had a long talk?" he said, to gain time.

"Confound you! The sun hasn't affected your head, has it? Why are you staring at me like a basilisk?"

"Beg pardon, sir. Wasn't aware I stared," Ricardo apologised good-humouredly. "The sun might well affect a thicker skull than mine. It blazes. Phew! What do you think a fellow is, sir—a salamander?"

"You ought to have been here," observed Mr. Jones.

"Did the beast give any signs of wanting to prance?" asked Ricardo quickly, with absolutely genuine anxiety. "It wouldn't do, sir. You must play him easy for at least a couple of days, sir. I have a plan. I have a notion that I can find out a lot in a couple of days."

"You have? In what way?"

"Why, by watching," Ricardo answered slowly.

Mr. Jones grunted.

"Nothing new, that. Watch, eh? Why not pray a little, too?"

"Ha, ha, ha! That's a good one," burst out the secretary, fixing Mr. Jones with mirthless eyes.

The latter dropped the subject indolently.

"Oh, you may be certain of at least two days," he said.

Ricardo recovered himself. His eyes gleamed voluptuously.

"We'll pull this off yet—clean—whole—right through, if you will only trust me, sir."

"I am trusting you right enough," said Mr. Jones. "It's your interest, too."

And, indeed, Ricardo was truthful enough in his statement. He did absolutely believe in success now. But he couldn't tell his governor that he had intelligences in the enemy's camp. It wouldn't do to tell him of the girl. Devil only knew what he would do if he learned there was a woman about. And how could he begin to tell of it? He couldn't confess his sudden escapade.

"We'll pull it off, sir," he said, with perfectly acted cheerfulness. He experienced gusts of awful joy expanding in his heart and hot like a fanned flame.

"We must," pronounced Mr. Jones. "This thing, Martin, is not like our other tries. I have a peculiar feeling about this. It's a different thing. It's a sort of test."

Ricardo was impressed by the governor's manner; for the first time a hint of passion could be detected in him. But also a word he used, the word "test," had struck him as particularly significant somehow. It was the last word uttered during that morning's conversation. Immediately afterwards Ricardo went out of the room. It was impossible for him to keep still. An elation in which an extraordinary softness mingled with savage triumph would not allow it. It prevented his thinking, also. He walked up and down the veranda far into the afternoon, eyeing the other bungalow at every turn. It gave no sign of being inhabited. Once or twice he stopped dead short and looked down at his left slipper. Each time he chuckled audibly. His restlessness kept on increasing till at last it frightened him. He caught hold of the balustrade of the veranda and stood still, smiling not at

his thoughts but at the strong sense of life within him. He abandoned himself to it carelessly, even recklessly. He cared for no one, friend or enemy. At that moment Mr. Jones called him by name from within. A shadow fell on the secretary's face.

"Here, sir," he answered; but it was a moment before he could make up his mind to go in.

He found his governor on his feet. Mr. Jones was tired of lying down when there was no necessity for it. His slender form, gliding about the room, came to a standstill.

"I've been thinking, Martin, of something you suggested. At the time it did not strike me as practical; but on reflection it seems to me that to propose a game is as good a way as any to let him understand that the time has come to disgorge. It's less—how should I say? —vulgar. He will know what it means. It's not a bad form to give to the business—which in itself is crude, Martin, crude."

"Want to spare his feelings?" jeered the secretary in such a bitter tone that Mr. Jones was really surprised.

"Why, it was your own notion, confound you!"

"Who says it wasn't?" retorted Ricardo sulkily. "But I am fairly sick of this crawling. No! No! Get the exact bearings of his swag and then a rip up. That's plenty good enough for him."

His passions being thoroughly aroused, a thirst for blood was allied in him with a thirst for tenderness—yes, tenderness. A sort of anxious, melting sensation pervaded and softened his heart when he thought of that girl—one of his own sort. And at the same time jealousy started gnawing at his breast as the image of Heyst intruded itself on his fierce anticipation of bliss.

"The crudeness of your ferocity is positively gross, Martin," Mr. Jones said disdainfully. "You don't even understand my purpose. I mean to have some sport out of him. Just try to imagine the atmosphere of the game—the fellow handling the cards—the agonising mockery of it! Oh, I shall appreciate this greatly. Yes, let him lose his money instead of being forced to hand it over. You,

of course, would shoot him at once, but I shall enjoy the refinement and the jest of it. He's a man of the best society. I've been hounded out of my sphere by people very much like that fellow. How enraged and humiliated he will be! I promise myself some exquisite moments while watching his play."

"Ay, and suppose he suddenly starts prancing! He may not appreciate the fun."

"I mean you to be present," Mr. Jones remarked calmly.

"Well, as long as I am free to plug him or rip him up whenever I think the time has come, you are welcome to your bit of sport, sir. I shan't spoil it."

VII

IT was at this precise moment of their conversation that Heyst had intruded on Mr. Jones and his secretary with his warning about Wang, as he had related to Lena. When he left them, the two looked at each other in wondering silence. Mr. Jones was the first to break it.

"I say, Martin!"

"Yes, sir."

"What does this mean?"

"It's some move. Blame me if I can understand!"

"Too deep for you?" Mr. Jones inquired drily.

"It's nothing but some of his infernal impudence," growled the secretary. "You don't believe all that about the Chink, do you, sir? 'Tain't true."

"It isn't necessary for it to be true to have a meaning for us. It's the why of his coming to tell us this tale that's important."

"Do you think he made it up to frighten us?" asked Ricardo.

Mr. Jones scowled at him thoughtfully.

"The man looked worried," he muttered, as if to himself. "Suppose that Chinaman has really stolen his money! The man looked very worried."

"Nothing but his artfulness, sir," protested Ricardo earnestly, for the idea was too disconcerting to entertain. "Is it likely that he would have trusted a Chink with enough knowledge to make it possible?" he argued warmly. "Why, it's the very thing that he would keep close about. There's something else there. Ay, but what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Mr. Jones let out a ghostly, squeaky laugh. "I've never been placed in such a ridiculous position before," he went on, with a sepulchral equanimity of tone. "It's you, Martin, who dragged me into it. However, it's my fault too. I ought to—but I was really too bored to use my brain, and yours is not to be trusted. You are a hothead!"

A blasphemous exclamation of grief escaped from Ricardo. Not to be trusted! Hothead! He was almost tearful.

"Haven't I heard you, sir, saying more than twenty times since we got fired out from Manila that we should want a lot of capital to work the East Coast with? You were always telling me that to prime properly all them officials and Portuguese scallawags we should have to lose heavily at first. Weren't you always worrying about some means of getting hold of a good lot of cash? It wasn't to be got hold of by allowing yourself to become bored in that rotten Dutch town and playing a twopenny game with confounded beggarly bank-clerks and such-like. Well, I've brought you here, where there is cash to be got—and a big lot, to a moral," he added through his set teeth.

Silence fell. Each of them was staring into a different corner of the room. Suddenly, with a slight stamp of his foot, Mr. Jones made for the door. Ricardo caught him up outside.

"Put your arm through mine, sir," he begged him gently but firmly. "No use giving the game away. An invalid may well come out for a breath of fresh air after the sun's gone down a bit. That's it, sir. But where do you want to go? Why did you come out, sir?"

Mr. Jones stopped short.

"I hardly know myself," he confessed in a hollow mutter, staring intently at the Number One bungalow. "It's quite irrational," he declared in a still lower tone.

"Better go in, sir," suggested Ricardo. "What's that? Those screens weren't down before. He's spying from behind them now, I bet—the dodging, artful, plotting beast!"

"Why not go over there and see if we can't get to the bottom of this game?" was the unexpected proposal uttered by Mr. Jones. "He will have to talk to us."

Ricardo repressed a start of dismay, but for a moment could not speak. He only pressed the governor's hand to his side instinctively.

"No, sir. What could you say? Do you expect to get to the bottom of his lies? How could you make him talk! It isn't time yet to come to grips with that gent. You don't think I would hang back, do you? His Chink, of course, I'll shoot like a dog the moment I catch sight of him; but as to that Mr. Blasted Heyst, the time isn't yet. My head's cooler just now than yours. Let's go in again. Why, we are exposed here. Suppose he took it into his head to let off a gun on us! He's an unaccountable, 'yporcritical skunk."

Allowing himself to be persuaded, Mr. Jones returned to his seclusion. The secretary, however, remained on the veranda—for the purpose, he said, of seeing whether that Chink wasn't sneaking around; in which case he proposed to take a long shot at the galoot and chance the consequences. His real reason was that he wanted to be alone, away from the governor's deep-sunk eyes. He felt a sentimental desire to indulge his fancies in solitude. A great change had come over Mr. Ricardo since that morning. A whole side of him which from prudence, from necessity, from loyalty, had been kept dormant, was aroused now, colouring his thoughts and disturbing his mental poise by the vision of such staggering consequences as, for instance, the possibility of an active conflict with his governor. The appearance of the monstrous Pedro with his news drew Ricardo out of a feeling of dreaminess wrapped up in a sense of impending trouble. A woman?

Yes, there was one; and it made all the difference. After driving away Pedro, and watching the white helmets of Heyst and Lena vanish among the bushes he stood lost in meditation.

"Where could they be off to like this?" he mentally asked himself.

The answer found by his speculative faculties on their utmost stretch was—to meet that Chink. For in the desertion of Wang Ricardo did not believe. It was a lying yarn, the organic part of a dangerous plot. Heyst had gone to combine some fresh move. But then Ricardo felt sure that the girl was with him—the girl, full of pluck, full of sense, full of understanding; an ally of his own kind!

He went indoors briskly. Mr. Jones had resumed his cross-legged pose at the head of the bed, with his back against the wall.

"Anything new?"

"No, sir."

Ricardo walked about the room as if he had no care in the world. He hummed snatches of song. Mr. Jones raised his waspish eyebrows at the sound. The secretary got down on his knees before an old leather trunk, and, rummaging in there, brought out a small looking-glass. He fell to examining his physiognomy in it with silent absorption.

"I think I'll shave," he decided, getting up.

He gave a sidelong glance to the governor, and repeated it several times during the operation, which did not take long, and even afterward, when, after putting away the implements, he resumed his walking, humming more snatches of unknown songs. Mr. Jones preserved a complete immobility, his thin lips compressed, his eyes veiled. His face was like a carving.

"So you would like to try your hand at cards with that skunk, sir?" said Ricardo, stopping suddenly and rubbing his hands.

Mr. Jones gave no sign of having heard anything.

"Well, why not? Why shouldn't he have the experience? You remember in that Mexican town—what's

it's name?—the robber fellow they caught in the mountains and condemned to be shot? He played cards half the night with the jailer and the sheriff. Well, this fellow is condemned, too. He must give you your game. Hang it all, a gentleman ought to have some little relaxation! And you have been uncommonly patient, sir."

"You are uncommonly volatile all of a sudden," Mr. Jones remarked in a bored voice. "What's come to you?"

The secretary hummed for a while, and then said:

"I'll try to get him over here for you to-night, after dinner. If I ain't here myself, don't you worry, sir. I shall be doing a bit of nosing round—see?"

"I see," sneered Mr. Jones languidly. "But what do *you* expect to see in the dark?"

Ricardo made no answer, and after another turn or two slipped out of the room. He no longer felt comfortable alone with the governor.

VIII

MEANTIME Heyst and Lena, walking rather fast, approached Wang's hut. Asking the girl to wait, Heyst ascended the little ladder of bamboos giving access to the door. It was as he had expected. The smoky interior was empty, except for a big chest of sandalwood too heavy for hurried removal. Its lid was thrown up, but whatever it might have contained was no longer there. All Wang's possessions were gone. Without tarrying in the hut, Heyst came back to the girl, who asked no questions, with her strange air of knowing or understanding everything.

"Let us push on," he said.

He went ahead, the rustle of her white skirt following him into the shades of the forest, along the path of their usual walk. Though the air lay heavy between straight denuded trunks, the sunlit patches moved on the ground, and raising her eyes Lena saw far above her head the flutter

of the leaves, the surface shudder on the mighty limbs extended horizontally in the perfect immobility of patience. Twice Heyst looked over his shoulder at her. Behind the readiness of her answering smile there was a fund of devoted, concentrated passion, burning with the hope of a more perfect satisfaction. They passed the spot where it was their practice to turn towards the barren summit of the central hill. Heyst held steadily on his way toward the upper limit of the forest. The moment they left its shelter, a breeze enveloped them, and a great cloud, racing over the sun, threw a peculiar sombre tint over everything. Heyst pointed up a precipitous, rugged path clinging to the side of the hill. It ended in a barricade of felled trees, a primitively conceived obstacle which must have cost much labour to erect at just that spot.

"This," Heyst explained in his urbane tone, "is a barrier against the march of civilisation. The poor folk over there did not like it, as it appeared to them in the shape of my company—a great step forward, as some people used to call it with mistaken confidence. The advanced foot has been drawn back, but the barricade remains."

They went on climbing slowly. The cloud had driven over, leaving an added brightness on the face of the world.

"It's a very ridiculous thing," Heyst went on; "but then it is the product of honest fear—fear of the unknown, of the incomprehensible. It's pathetic, too, in a way. And I heartily wish, Lena, that we were on the other side of it."

"Oh, stop, stop!" she cried, seizing his arm.

The face of the barricade they were approaching had been piled up with a lot of fresh-cut branches. The leaves were still green. A gentle breeze, sweeping over the top, stirred them a little; but what had startled the girl was the discovery of several spear-blades protruding from the mass of foliage. She had made them out suddenly. They did not gleam, but she saw them with extreme distinctness, very still, very vicious to look at.

"You had better let me go forward alone, Lena," said Heyst.

She tugged persistently at his arm, but after a time, during which he never ceased to look smilingly into her terrified eyes, he ended by disengaging himself.

"It's a sign rather than a demonstration," he argued persuasively. "Just wait here a moment. I promise not to approach near enough to be stabbed."

As in a nightmare she watched Heyst go up the few yards of the path as if he never meant to stop; and she heard his voice, like voices heard in dreams, shouting unknown words in an unearthly tone. Heyst was only demanding to see Wang. He was not kept waiting very long. Recovering from the first flurry of her fright, Lena noticed a commotion in the green top-dressing of the barricade. She exhaled a sigh of relief when the spear-blades retreated out of sight, sliding inward—the horrible things! In a spot facing Heyst a pair of yellow hands parted the leaves, and a face filled the small opening—a face with very noticeable eyes. It was Wang's face, of course, with no suggestion of a body belonging to it, like those cardboard faces at which she remembered gazing as a child in the window of a certain dim shop kept by a mysterious little man in Kingsland Road. Only this face, instead of mere holes, had eyes which blinked. She could see the beating of the eyelids. The hands on each side of the face, keeping the boughs apart, also did not look as if they belonged to any real body. One of them was holding a revolver—a weapon which she recognised merely by intuition, never having seen such an object before.

She leaned her shoulders against the rock of the perpendicular hillside and kept her eyes on Heyst, with comparative composure, since the spears were not menacing him any longer. Beyond the rigid and motionless back he presented to her, she saw Wang's unreal cardboard face moving its thin lips and grimacing artificially. She was too far down the path to hear the dialogue, carried on in an ordinary voice. She waited patiently for its end. Her shoulders felt the warmth of the rock; now and then a whiff of cooler air seemed to slip down upon her head from above; the ravine at her feet, choked full of vegetation, emitted the faint, drowsy hum of insect life. Every-

thing was very quiet. She failed to notice the exact moment when Wang's head vanished from the foliage, taking the unreal hands away with it. To her horror, the spear-blades came gliding slowly out. The very hair on her head stirred; but before she had time to cry out, Heyst, who seemed rooted to the ground, turned round abruptly and began to move toward her. His great moustaches did not quite hide an ugly but irresolute smile; and when he had come down near enough to touch her, he burst out into a harsh laugh:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

She looked at him, uncomprehending. He cut short his laugh and said curtly:

"We had better go down as we came."

She followed him into the forest. The advance of the afternoon had filled it with gloom. Far away a slant of light between the trees closed the view. All was dark beyond. Heyst stopped.

"No reason to hurry, Lena," he said in his ordinary, serenely polite tones. "We return unsuccessful. I suppose you know, or at least can guess, what was my object in coming up there?"

"No, I can't guess, dear," she said, and smiled, noticing with emotion that his breast was heaving as if he had been out of breath. Nevertheless, he tried to command his speech, pausing only a little between the words.

"No? I went up to find Wang. I went up"—he gasped again here, but this was for the last time—"I made you come with me because I didn't like to leave you unprotected in the proximity of those fellows." Suddenly he snatched his cork helmet off his head and flashed it on the ground. "No!" he cried roughly. "All this is too unreal altogether. It isn't to be borne! I can't protect you! I haven't the power."

He glared at her for a moment, then hastened after his hat, which had bounded away to some distance. He came back looking at her face, which was very white.

"I ought to beg your pardon for these antics," he said, adjusting his hat. "A movement of childish petulance! Indeed, I feel very much like a child in my

ignorance, in my powerlessness, in my want of resource, in everything except in the dreadful consciousness of some evil hanging over your head—yours!"

"It's you they are after," she murmured.

"No doubt, but unfortunately—"

"Unfortunately—what?"

"Unfortunately, I have not succeeded with Wang," he said. "I failed to move his Celestial heart—that is, if there is such a thing. He told me with horrible Chinese reasonableness that he could not let us pass the barrier, because we should be pursued. He doesn't like fights. He gave me to understand that he would shoot me with my own revolver without any sort of compunction, rather than risk a rude and distasteful contest with the strange barbarians for my sake. He has preached to the villagers. They respect him. He is the most remarkable man they have ever seen, and their kinsman by marriage. They understand his policy. And anyway only women and children and a few old fellows are left in the village. This is the season when the men are away in trading vessels. But it would have been all the same. None of them have a taste for fighting—and with white men too! They are peaceable, kindly folk and would have seen me shot with extreme satisfaction. Wang seemed to think my insistence—for I insisted, you know—very stupid and tactless. But a drowning man clutches at straws. We were talking in such Malay as we are both equal to.

"'Your fears are foolish,' I said to him.

"'Foolish? Of course I am foolish,' he replied. 'If I were a wise man, I would be a merchant with a big hong in Singapore, instead of being a mine coolie turned house-boy. But if you don't go away in time, I will shoot you before it grows too dark to take aim. Not till then, Number One, but I will do it then. Now—finish!'

"'All right,' I said. 'Finish as far as I am concerned; but you can have no objections to the *mem putih* coming over to stay with the Orang Kaya's women for a few days. I will make a present in silver for it.' Orang Kaya is the head man of the village, Lena," added Heyst.

She looked at him in astonishment.

"You wanted me to go to that village of savages?" she gasped. "You wanted me to leave you?"

"It would have given me a freer hand."

Heyst stretched out his hands and looked at them for a moment, then let them fall by his side. Indignation was expressed more in the curve of her lips than in her clear eyes, which never wavered.

"I believe Wang laughed," he went on. "He made a noise like a turkey-cock.

"'That would be worse than anything,' he told me.

"I was taken aback. I pointed out to him that he was talking nonsense. It could not make any difference to his security where you were, because the evil men, as he calls them, did not know of your existence. I did not lie exactly, Lena, though I did stretch the truth till it cracked; but the fellow seems to have an uncanny insight. He shook his head. He assured me they knew all about you. He made a horrible grimace at me."

"It doesn't matter," said the girl. "I didn't want —I would not have gone."

Heyst raised his eyes.

"Wonderful intuition! As I continued to press him, Wang made that very remark about you. When he smiles, his face looks like a conceited death's head. It was his very last remark—that you wouldn't want to. I went away then."

She leaned back against a tree. Heyst faced her in the same attitude of leisure, as if they had done with time and all the other concerns of the earth. Suddenly, high above their heads, the roof of leaves whispered at them tumultuously and then ceased.

"That was a strange notion of yours, to send me away," she said. "Send me away? What for? Yes, what for?"

"You seem indignant," he remarked listlessly.

"To these savages, too!" she pursued. "And you think I would have gone? You can do what you like with me—but not that, not that!"

Heyst looked into the dim aisles of the forest. Every thing was so still now that the very ground on which they stood seemed to exhale silence into the shade.

"Why be indignant?" he remonstrated. "It has not happened. I gave up pleading with Wang. Here we are, repulsed! Not only without power to resist the evil, but unable to make terms for ourselves with the worthy envoys, the envoys extraordinary of the world we thought we had done with for years and years. And that's bad, Lena, very bad."

"It's funny," she said thoughtfully. "Bad? I suppose it is. I don't know that it is. But do you? Do you? You talk as if you didn't believe in it."

She gazed at him earnestly.

"Do I? Ah! That's it. I don't know how to talk. I have managed to refine everything away. I've said to the Earth that bore me: 'I am I and you are a shadow.' And, by Jove, it is so! But it appears that such words cannot be uttered with impunity. Here I am on a Shadow inhabited by Shades. How helpless a man is against the Shades! How is one to intimidate, persuade, resist, assert oneself against them? I have lost all belief in realities. . . . Lena, give me your hand."

She looked at him surprised, uncomprehending.

"Your hand," he cried.

She obeyed; he seized it with avidity as if eager to raise it to his lips, but half-way up released his grasp. They looked at each other for a time.

"What's the matter, dear?" she whispered timidly.

"Neither force nor conviction," Heyst muttered wearily to himself. "How am I to meet this charmingly simple problem?"

"I am sorry," she murmured.

"And so am I," he confessed quickly. "And the bitterest of this humiliation is its complete uselessness—which I feel, I feel!"

She had never before seen him give such signs of feeling. Across his ghastly face the long moustaches flamed in the shade. He spoke suddenly:

"I wonder if I could find enough courage to creep among them in the night, with a knife, and cut their throats one after another, as they slept! I wonder—"

She was frightened by his unwonted appearance more

than by the words in his mouth, and said earnestly:

"Don't you try to do such a thing! Don't you think of it!"

"I don't possess anything bigger than a penknife. As to thinking of it, Lena, there's no saying what one may think of. I don't think. Something in me thinks —something foreign to my nature. What is the matter?"

He noticed her parted lips, and the peculiar stare in her eyes, which had wandered from his face.

"There's somebody after us. I saw something white moving," she cried.

Heyst did not turn his head; he only glanced at her outstretched arm.

"No doubt we are followed; we are watched."

"I don't see anything now," she said.

"And it does not matter," Heyst went on in his ordinary voice. "Here we are in the forest. I have neither strength nor persuasion. Indeed, it's extremely difficult to be eloquent before a Chinaman's head stuck at one out of a lot of brushwood. But can we wander among these big trees indefinitely? Is this a refuge? No! What else is left to us? I did think for a moment of the mine; but even there we could not remain very long. And then that gallery is not safe. The props were too weak to begin with. Ants have been at work there —ants after the men. A death-trap, at best. One can die but once, but there are many manners of death."

The girl glanced about fearfully, in search of the watcher or follower whom she had glimpsed once among the trees; but if he existed, he had concealed himself. Nothing met her eyes but the deepening shadows of the short vistas between the living columns of the still roof of leaves. She looked at the man beside her expectantly, tenderly, with suppressed affright and a sort of awed wonder.

"I have also thought of these people's boat," Heyst went on. "We could get into that, and—only they have taken everything out of her. I have seen her oars and mast in a corner of their room. To shove off in an empty boat would be nothing but a desperate expedient, supposing even that she would drift out a good distance

between the islands before the morning. It would only be a complicated manner of committing suicide—to be found dead in a boat, dead from sun and thirst. A sea mystery. I wonder who would find us! Davidson, perhaps; but Davidson passed westward ten days ago. I watched him steaming past one early morning, from the jetty."

"You never told me," she said.

"He must have been looking at me through his big binoculars. Perhaps, if I had raised my arm—but what did we want with Davidson then, you and I? He won't be back this way for three weeks or more, Lena. I wish I had raised my arm that morning."

"What would have been the good of it?" she sighed out.

"What good? No good, of course. We had no forebodings. This seemed to be an inexpugnable refuge, where we could live untroubled and learn to know each other."

"It's perhaps in trouble that people get to know each other," she suggested.

"Perhaps," he said indifferently. "At any rate, we would not have gone away from here with him; though I believe he would have come in eagerly enough, and ready for any service he could render. It's that fat man's nature—a delightful fellow. You would not come on the wharf that time I sent the shawl back to Mrs. Schomberg through him. He has never seen you."

"I didn't know that you wanted anybody ever to see me," she said.

He had folded his arms on his breast and hung his head.

"And I did not know that you cared to be seen as yet. A misunderstanding evidently. An honourable misunderstanding. But it does not matter now."

He raised his head after a silence.

"How gloomy this forest has grown! Yet surely the sun cannot have set already."

She looked round; and as if her eyes had just been opened, she perceived the shades of the forest surrounding her, not so much with gloom, but with a sullen, dumb, menacing hostility. Her heart sank in the engulfing

stillness; at that moment she felt the nearness of death breathing on her and on the man with her. If there had been a sudden stir of leaves, the crack of a dry branch, the faintest rustle, she would have screamed aloud. But she shook off the unworthy weakness. Such as she was, a fiddle-scraping girl picked up on the very threshold of infamy, she would try to rise above herself, triumphant and humble; and then happiness would burst on her like a torrent, flinging at her feet the man whom she loved.

Heyst stirred slightly.

"We had better be getting back, Lena, since we can't stay all night in the woods—or anywhere else, for that matter. We are the slaves of this infernal surprise which has been sprung on us by—shall I say fate?—your fate, or mine."

It was the man who had broken the silence, but it was the woman who led the way. At the very edge of the forest she stopped, concealed by a tree. He joined her cautiously.

"What is it? What do you see, Lena?" he whispered.

She said that it was only a thought that had come into her head. She hesitated for a moment, giving him over her shoulder a shining gleam of her grey eyes. She wanted to know whether this trouble, this danger, this evil, whatever it was, finding them out in their retreat, was not a sort of punishment.

"Punishment?" repeated Heyst. He could not understand what she meant. When she explained, he was still more surprised. "A sort of retribution from an angry Heaven?" he said in wonder. "On us? What on earth for?"

He saw her pale face darken in the dusk. She had blushed. Her whispering flowed very fast. It was the way they lived together—that wasn't right, was it? It was a guilty life. For she had not been forced into it, driven, scared into it. No, no—she had come to him of her own free will, with her whole soul yearning unlawfully.

He was so profoundly touched that he could not speak for a moment. To conceal his trouble, he assumed his best Heystian manner.

"What? Are our visitors then messengers of morality, avengers of righteousness, agents of Providence? That's certainly an original view. How flattered they would be if they could hear you!"

"Now you are making fun of me," she said in a subdued voice which broke suddenly.

"Are you conscious of sin?" Heyst asked gravely. She made no answer. "For I am not," he added; "before Heaven, I am not!"

"You! You are different. Woman is the tempter. You took me up from pity. I threw myself at you."

"Oh, you exaggerate, you exaggerate. It was not so bad as that," he said playfully, keeping his voice steady with an effort.

He considered himself a dead man already, yet forced to pretend that he was alive for her sake, for her defence. He regretted that he had no Heaven to which he could recommend this fair, palpitating handful of ashes and dust —warm, living, sentient, his own—and exposed helplessly to insult, outrage, degradation, and infinite misery of the body.

She had averted her face from him and was still. He suddenly seized her passive hand.

"You will have it so?" he said. "Yes? Well, let us then hope for mercy together."

She shook her head without looking at him, like an abashed child.

"Remember," he went on incorrigible with his delicate raillery, "that hope is a Christian virtue, and, surely, you can't want all the mercy for yourself."

Before their eyes the bungalow across the cleared ground stood bathed in a sinister light. An unexpected chill gust of wind made a noise in the tree-tops. She snatched her hand away and stepped out into the open; but before she had advanced more than three yards, she stood still and pointed to the west.

"Oh, look there!" she exclaimed.

Beyond the headland of Diamond Bay, lying black on a purple sea, great masses of cloud stood piled up and bathed in a mist of blood. A crimson crack like an open

wound zigzagged between them, with a piece of dark red sun showing at the bottom. Heyst cast an indifferent glance at the ill-omened chaos of the sky.

"Thunderstorm making up. We shall hear it all night, but it won't visit us, probably. The clouds generally gather round the volcano."

She was not listening to him. Her eyes reflected the sombre and violent hues of the sunset.

"That does not look much like a sign of mercy," she said slowly, as if to herself, and hurried on, followed by Heyst. Suddenly she stopped. "I don't care. I would do more yet! And some day you'll forgive me. You'll have to forgive me!"

IX

STUMBLING up the steps, as if suddenly exhausted, Lena entered the room and let herself fall on the nearest chair. Before following her, Heyst took a survey of the surroundings from the veranda. It was a complete solitude. There was nothing in the aspect of this familiar scene to tell him that he and the girl were not as completely alone as they had been in the early days of their common life on this abandoned spot, with only Wang discreetly materialising from time to time and the uncomplaining memory of Morrison to keep them company.

After the cold gust of wind there was an absolute stillness of the air. The thunder-charged mass hung unbroken beyond the low, ink-black headland, darkening the twilight. By contrast, the sky at the zenith displayed pellucid clearness, the sheen of a delicate glass bubble which the merest movement of air might shatter. A little to the left, between the black masses of the headland and of the forest, the volcano, a feather of smoke by day and a cigar-glow at night, took its first fiery expanding breath of the evening. Above it a reddish star came out like an expelled spark from the fiery bosom of the earth, enchanted into permanency by the mysterious spell of frozen spaces.

In front of Heyst the forest, already full of the deepest shades, stood like a wall. But he lingered, watching its edge, especially where it ended at the line of bushes, masking the land end of the jetty. Since the girl had spoken of catching a glimpse of something white among the trees, he believed pretty firmly that they had been followed in their excursion up the mountain by Mr. Jones's secretary. No doubt the fellow had watched them out of the forest, and now, unless he took the trouble to go back some distance and fetch a considerable circuit inland over the clearing, he was bound to walk out into the open space before the bungalows. Heyst did, indeed, imagine at one time some movement between the trees, lost as soon as perceived. He stared patiently, but nothing more happened. After all, why should he trouble about these people's actions? Why this stupid concern for the preliminaries, since, when the issue was joined, it would find him disarmed and shrinking from the ugliness and degradation of it?

He turned and entered the room. Deep dusk reigned in there already. Lena, near the door, did not move or speak. The sheen of the white tablecloth was very obtrusive. The brute these two vagabonds had tamed had entered on its service while Heyst and Lena were away. The table was laid. Heyst walked up and down the room several times. The girl remained without sound or movement on the chair. But when Heyst, placing the two silver candelabra on the table, struck a match to light the candles, she got up suddenly and went into the bedroom. She came out again almost immediately, having taken off her hat. Heyst looked at her over his shoulder.

"What's the good of shirking the evil hour? I've lighted these candles for a sign of our return. After all, we might not have been watched—while returning, I mean. Of course we were seen leaving the house."

The girl sat down again. The great wealth of her hair looked very dark above her colourless face. She raised her eyes, glistening softly in the light with a sort of unreadable appeal, with a strange effect of unseeing innocence.

"Yes," said Heyst across the table, the finger-tips of one hand resting on the immaculate cloth. "A creature with an antediluvian lower jaw, hairy like a mastodon, and formed like a prehistoric ape, has laid this table. Are you awake, Lena? Am I? I would pinch myself only I know that nothing would do away with this dream. Three covers. You know it is the shorter of the two who's coming—the gentleman who, in the play of his shoulders as he walks, and in his facial structure, recalls a jaguar. Ah, you don't know what a jaguar is? But you have had a good look at these two. It's the short one, you know, who's to be our guest."

She made a sign with her head that she knew. Heyst's insistence brought Ricardo vividly before her mental vision. A sudden languor, like the physical echo of her struggle with the man, paralysed all her limbs. She lay still in the chair, feeling very frightened at this phenomenon—ready to pray aloud for strength.

Heyst had started to pace the room.

"Our guest! There is a proverb—in Russia, I believe—that when a guest enters the house, God enters the house. The sacred virtue of hospitality! But it leads one into trouble as well as any other."

The girl unexpectedly got up from the chair, swaying her supple figure and stretching her arms above her head. He stopped to look at her curiously, paused, and then went on:

"I venture to think that God has nothing to do with such a hospitality and with such a guest!"

She had jumped to her feet to react against the numbness, to discover whether her body would obey her will. It did. She could stand up, and she could move her arms freely. Though no physiologist, she concluded that all that sudden numbness was in her head, not in her limbs. Her fears assuaged, she thanked God for it mentally, and to Heyst murmured a protest:

"Oh, yes! He's got to do with everything—every little thing. Nothing can happen—"

"Yes," he said hastily; "one of the two sparrows can't be struck to the ground—you are thinking of that."

The habitual playful smile faded on the kindly lips under the martial moustache. "Ah, you remember what you have been told—as a child—on Sundays."

"Yes, I do remember." She sank into the chair again. "It was the only decent bit of time I ever had when I was a kid, with our landlady's two girls, you know."

"I wonder, Lena," Heyst said, with a return of his urbane playfulness, "whether you are just a little child, or whether you represent something as old as the world."

She surprised Heyst by saying dreamily:

"Well—and what about you?"

"I? I date later—much later. I can't call myself a child, but I am so recent that I may call myself a man of the last hour—or is it the hour before last? I have been out of it so long that I am not certain how far the hands of the clock have moved since—since—"

He glanced at the portrait of his father, exactly above the head of the girl, and as it were ignoring her in its painted austerity of feeling. He did not finish the sentence; but he did not remain silent for long.

"Only what must be avoided are fallacious inferences, my dear Lena—especially at this hour."

"Now you are making fun of me again," she said without looking up.

"Am I?" he cried. "Making fun? No, giving warning. Hang it all, whatever truth people told you in the old days, there is also this one—that sparrows do fall to the ground, that they are brought down to the ground. This is no vain assertion, but a fact. That's why"—again his tone changed, while he picked up a table knife and let it fall disdainfully—"that's why I wish these wretched round knives had some edge on them. Absolute rubbish—neither edge, point, nor substance. I believe one of these forks would make a better weapon at a pinch. But can I go about with a fork in my pocket?" He gnashed his teeth with a rage very real, and yet comic.

"There used to be a carver here, but it was broken and thrown away a long time ago. Nothing much to carve here. It would have made a noble weapon, no doubt; but—"

He stopped. The girl sat very quiet, with downcast eyes. As he kept silent for some time, she looked up and said thoughtfully:

"Yes, a knife—it's a knife that you would want, wouldn't you, in case, in case—"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"There must be a crowbar or two in the sheds; but I have given up all the keys together. And then, do you see me walking about with a crowbar in my hand? Ha, ha! And besides, that edifying sight alone might start the trouble for all I know. In truth, why has it not started yet?"

"Perhaps they are afraid of you," she whispered, looking down again.

"By Jove, it looks like it," he assented meditatively. "They do seem to hang back for some reason. Is that reason prudence, or downright fear, or perhaps the leisurely method of certitude?"

Out in the black night, not very far from the bungalow, resounded a loud and prolonged whistle. Lena's hands grasped the side of the chair, but she made no movement. Heyst started, and turned his face away from the door.

The startling sound had died away.

"Whistles, yells, omens, signals, portents—what do they matter?" he said. "But what about that crowbar? Suppose I had it! Could I stand in ambush at the side of the door—this door—and smash the first protruding head, scatter blood and brains over the floor, over these walls, and then run stealthily to the other door to do the same thing—and repeat the performance for a third time, perhaps? Could I? On suspicion, without compunction, with a calm and determined purpose? No, it is not in me. I date too late. Would you like to see me attempt this thing while that mysterious prestige of mine lasts—or their not less mysterious hesitation?"

"No, no!" she whispered ardently, as if compelled to speak by his eyes fixed on her face. "No, it's a knife you want to defend yourself with—to defend—there will be time—"

"And who knows if it isn't really my duty?" he began

again, as if he had not heard her disjointed words at all. "It may be—my duty to you, to myself. For why should I put up with the humiliation of their secret menaces? Do you know what the world would say?"

He emitted a low laugh, which struck her with terror. She would have got up, but he stooped so low over her that she could not move without first pushing him away.

"It would say, Lena, that I—that Swede—after luring my friend and partner to his death from mere greed of money, have murdered these unoffending shipwrecked strangers from sheer funk. That would be the story whispered—perhaps shouted—certainly spread out, and believed—and *believed*, my dear Lena!"

"Who would believe such awful things?"

"Perhaps you wouldn't—not at first, at any rate; but the power of calumny grows with time. It's insidious and penetrating. It can even destroy one's faith in oneself—dry-rot the soul."

All at once her eyes leaped to the door and remained fixed, stony, a little enlarged. Turning his head, Heyst beheld the figure of Ricardo framed in the doorway. For a moment none of the three moved; then, looking from the newcomer to the girl in the chair, Heyst formulated a sardonic introduction.

"Mr. Ricardo, my dear."

Her head drooped a little. Ricardo's hand went up to his moustache. His voice exploded in the room.

"At your service, ma'am!"

He stepped in, taking his hat off with a flourish, and dropping it carelessly on a chair near the door.

"At your service," he repeated, in quite another tone. "I was made aware there was a lady about, by that Pedro of ours; only I didn't know I should have the privilege of seeing you to-night, ma'am."

Lena and Heyst looked at him covertly, but he, with a vague gaze, avoiding them both, looked at nothing, seeming to pursue some point in space.

"Had a pleasant walk?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes. And you?" returned Heyst, who had managed to catch his glance.

"I? I haven't been a yard away from the governor this afternoon till I started for here." The genuineness of the accent surprised Heyst, without convincing him of the truth of the words. "Why do you ask?" pursued Ricardo with every inflexion of perfect candour.

"You might have wished to explore the island a little," said Heyst, studying the man, who, to render him justice, did not try to free his captured gaze. "I may remind you that it wouldn't be a perfectly safe proceeding."

Ricardo presented a picture of innocence.

"Oh, yes!—meaning that Chink that has run away from you. He ain't much!"

"He has a revolver," observed Heyst meaningly.

"Well, and you have a revolver, too," Mr. Ricardo argued unexpectedly. "I don't worry myself about that."

"I? That's different. I am not afraid of you," Heyst made answer after a short pause.

"Of me?"

"Of all of you."

"You have a queer way of putting things," began Ricardo.

At that moment the door on the compound side of the house came open with some noise, and Pedro entered, pressing the edge of a loaded tray to his breast. His big hairy head rolled a little, his feet fell in front of each other with a short, hard thump on the floor. The arrival changed the current of Ricardo's thought, perhaps, but certainly of his speech.

"You heard me whistling a little while ago outside? That was to give him a hint, as I came along, that it was time to bring in the dinner; and here it is."

Lena rose and passed to the right of Ricardo, who lowered his glance for a moment. They sat down at the table. The enormous gorilla back of Pedro swayed out through the door.

"Extraordinary strong brute, ma'am," said Ricardo. He had a propensity to talk about "his Pedro," as some men will talk of their dog. "He ain't pretty, though. No, he ain't pretty. And he has got to be kept under. I am his keeper, as it might be. The governor don't

trouble his head much about dee-tails. All that's left to Martin. Martin, that's me, ma'am."

Heyst saw the girl's eyes turn toward Mr. Jones's secretary and rest blankly on his face. Ricardo, however, looked vaguely into space, and, with faint flickers of a smile about his lips, made conversation indefatigably against the silence of his entertainers. He boasted largely of his long association with Mr. Jones—over four years now, he said. Then, glancing rapidly at Heyst:

"You can see at once he's a gentleman, can't you?"

"You people," Heyst said, his habitual playful intonation tinged with gloom, "are divorced from all reality in my eyes."

Ricardo received this speech as if he had been expecting to hear those very words, or else did not mind at all what Heyst might say. He muttered an absent-minded "Ay, ay," played with a bit of biscuit, sighed, and said, with a peculiar stare which did not seem to carry any distance, but to stop short at a point in the air very near his face:

"Anybody can see at once *you* are one. You and the governor ought to understand each other. He expects to see you to-night. The governor isn't well, and we've got to think of getting away from here."

While saying these words he turned himself full toward Lena, but without any marked expression. Leaning back with folded arms, the girl stared before her as if she had been alone in the room. But under that aspect of almost vacant unconcern the perils and emotion that had entered into her life warmed her heart, exalted her mind with a sense of an inconceivable intensity of existence.

"Really? Thinking of going away from here?" Heyst murmured.

"The best of friends must part," Ricardo pronounced slowly. "And, as long as they part friends, there's no harm done. We two are used to be on the move. You, I understand, prefer to stick in one place."

It was obvious that all this was being said merely for the sake of talking, and that Ricardo's mind was con-

centrated on some purpose unconnected with the words that were coming out of his mouth.

"I should like to know," Heyst asked with incisive politeness, "how you have come to understand this or anything else about me? As far as I can remember, I've made you no confidences."

Ricardo, gazing comfortably into space out of the back of his chair—for some time all three had given up any pretence of eating—answered abstractedly.

"Any fellow might have guessed it." He sat up suddenly, and uncovered all his teeth in a grin of extraordinary ferocity, which was belied by the persistent amiability of his tone. "The governor will be the man to tell you something about that. I wish you would say you would see my governor. He's the one who does all our talking. Let me take you to him this evening. He ain't at all well; and he can't make up his mind to go away without having a talk with you."

Heyst, looking up, met Lena's eyes. Their expression of candour seemed to hide some struggling intention. Her head, he fancied, had made an imperceptible affirmative movement. Why? What reason could she have? Was it the prompting of some obscure instinct? Or was it simply a delusion of his own senses? But in this strange complication invading the quietude of his life, in his state of doubt and disdain and almost of despair with which he looked at himself, he would let even a delusive appearance guide him through a darkness so dense that it made for indifference.

"Well, suppose I *do* say so."

Ricardo did not conceal his satisfaction, which for a moment interested Heyst.

"It can't be my life they are after," he said to himself. "What good could it be to them?"

He looked across the table at the girl. What did it matter whether she had nodded or not? As always, when looking into her unconscious eyes, he tasted something like the dregs of tender pity. He had decided to go. Her nod, imaginary or not imaginary, advice or illusion, had tipped the scale. He reflected that Ricardo's invitation could

scarcely be anything in the nature of a trap. It would have been too absurd. Why carry subtly into a trap some one already bound hand and foot, as it were?

All this time he had been looking fixedly at the girl he called Lena. In the submissive quietness of her being, which had been her attitude ever since they had begun their life on the island, she remained as secret as ever. Heyst got up abruptly, with a smile of such enigmatic and despairing character that Mr. Secretary Ricardo, whose abstract gaze had an all-round efficiency, made a slight crouching start, as if to dive under the table for his leg-knife—a start that was repressed as soon as begun. He had expected Heyst to spring on him or draw a revolver, because he created for himself a vision of him in his own image. Instead of doing either of these evident things, Heyst walked across the room, opened the door, and put his head through it to look out into the compound.

As soon as his back was turned, Ricardo's hand sought the girl's arm under the table. He was not looking at her, but she felt the groping, nervous touch of his search, felt suddenly the grip of his fingers above her wrist. He leaned forward a little; still he dared not look at her. His hard stare remained fastened on Heyst's back. In an extremely low hiss, his fixed idea of argument found expression scathingly:

"See! He's no good. He's not the man for you!"

He glanced at her at last. Her lips moved a little, and he was awed by that movement without a sound. Next instant the hard grasp of his fingers vanished from her arm. Heyst had shut the door. On his way back to the table, he crossed the path of the girl they had called Alma—she didn't know why—also Magdalen, whose mind had remained so long in doubt as to the reason of her own existence. She no longer wondered at that bitter riddle, since her heart found its solution in a blinding, hot glow of passionate purpose.

X

SHE passed by Heyst as if she had indeed been blinded by some secret, lurid, and consuming glare into which she was about to enter. The curtain of the bedroom door fell behind her into rigid folds. Ricardo's vacant gaze seemed to be watching the dancing flight of a fly in mid-air.

"Extra dark outside, ain't it?" he muttered.

"Not so dark but that I could see that man of yours prowling about there," said Heyst in measured tones.

"What—Pedro? He's scarcely a man, you know; or else I wouldn't be so fond of him as I am."

"Very well. Let's call him your worthy associate."

"Ay! Worthy enough for what we want of him. A great stand-by is Peter in a scrimmage. A growl and a bite—oh, my! And you don't want him about?"

"I don't."

"You want him out of the way?" insisted Ricardo, with an affectation of incredulity which Heyst accepted calmly, though the air in the room seemed to grow more oppressive with every word spoken.

"That's it. I do want him out of the way." He forced himself to speak equably.

"Lor'! That's no great matter. Pedro's not much use here. The business my governor's after can be settled by ten minutes' rational talk with—with another gentleman. Quiet talk!"

He looked up suddenly with hard, phosphorescent eyes. Heyst didn't move a muscle. Ricardo congratulated himself on having left his revolver behind. He was so exasperated that he didn't know what he might have done. He said at last:

"You want poor, harmless Peter out of the way before you let me take you to see the governor—is that it?"

"Yes, that is it."

"H'm! One can see," Ricardo said with hidden venom, "that you are a gentleman; but all that gentlemanly fancifulness is apt to turn sour on a plain man's stomach. However—you'll have to pardon me."

He put his fingers into his mouth and let out a whistle which seemed to drive a thin, sharp shaft of air solidly against one's nearest ear-drum. Though he greatly enjoyed Heyst's involuntary grimace, he sat perfectly stolid waiting for the effect of the call.

It brought Pedro in with an extraordinary, uncouth, primeval impetuosity. The door flew open with a clatter, and the wild figure it disclosed seemed anxious to devastate the room in leaps and bounds; but Ricardo raised his open palm, and the creature came in quietly. His enormous half-closed paws swung to and fro a little in front of his bowed trunk as he walked. Ricardo looked on truculently.

"You go to the boat—understand? Go now!"

The little red eyes of the tame monster blinked with painful attention in the mass of hair.

"Well? Why don't you get? Forgot human speech, eh? Don't you know any longer what a boat is?"

"*Si*—boat," the creature stammered out doubtfully.

"Well, go there—the boat at the jetty. March off to it and sit there, lie down there, do anything but go to sleep there—till you hear my call, and then fly here. Them's your orders. March! Get, *vamos!* No, not that way—out through the front door. No sulks!"

Pedro obeyed with uncouth alacrity. When he had gone, the gleam of pitiless savagery went out of Ricardo's yellow eyes, and his physiognomy took on, for the first time that evening, the expression of a domestic cat which is being noticed.

"You can watch him right into the bushes, if you like. Too dark, eh? Why not go with him to the very spot, then?"

Heyst made a gesture of vague protest.

"There's nothing to assure me that he will stay there. I have no doubt of his going; but it's an act without a guarantee."

"There you are!" Ricardo shrugged his shoulders philosophically. "Can't be helped. Short of shooting our Pedro, nobody can make absolutely sure of his staying in the same place longer than he has a mind to; but I tell you, he lives in holy terror of my temper. That's why

I put on my sudden-death air when I talk to him. And yet I wouldn't shoot him—not I, unless in such a fit of rage as would make a man shoot his favourite dog. Look here, sir! This deal is on the square. I didn't tip him a wink to do anything else. He won't budge from the jetty. Are you coming along now, sir?"

A short silence ensued. Ricardo's jaws were working ominously under his skin. His eyes glided voluptuously here and there, cruel and dreamy. Heyst checked a sudden movement, reflected for a while, then said:

"You must wait a little."

"Wait a little! Wait a little! What does he think a fellow is—a graven image?" grumbled Ricardo half audibly.

Heyst went into the bedroom, and shut the door after him with a bang. Coming from the light, he could not see a thing in there at first; yet he received the impression of the girl getting up from the floor. On the less opaque darkness of the shutter-hole, her head detached itself suddenly, very faint, a mere hint of a round, dark shape without a face.

"I am going, Lena. I am going to confront these scoundrels." He was surprised to feel two arms falling on his shoulders. "I thought that you—" he began.

"Yes, yes!" the girl whispered hastily.

She neither clung to him nor yet did she try to draw him to her. Her hands grasped his shoulders, and she seemed to him to be staring into his face in the dark. And now he could see something of her face, too—an oval without features—and faintly distinguish her person, in the blackness, a form without definite lines.

"You have a black dress here, haven't you, Lena?" he asked, speaking rapidly, and so low that she could just hear him.

"Yes—an old thing."

"Very good. Put it on at once."

"But why?"

"Not for mourning!" There was something peremptory in the slightly ironic murmur. "Can you find it and get into it in the dark?"

She could. She would try. He waited, very still. He could imagine her movements over there at the far end of the room; but his eyes, accustomed now to the darkness, had lost her completely. When she spoke, her voice surprised him by its nearness. She had done what he had told her to do, and had approached him, invisible.

"Good! Where's that piece of purple veil I've seen lying about?" he asked.

There was no answer, only a slight rustle.

"Where is it?" he repeated impatiently.

Her unexpected breath was on his cheek.

"In my hands."

'Capital! Listen, Lena. As soon as I leave the bungalow with that horrible scoundrel, you slip out at the back—instantly, lose no time!—and run round into the forest. That will be your time, while we are walking away, and I am sure he won't give me the slip. Run into the forest behind the fringe of bushes between the big trees. You will know, surely, how to find a place in full view of the front door. I fear for you; but in this black dress, with most of your face muffled up in that dark veil, I defy anybody to find you there before daylight. Wait in the forest till the table is pushed into full view of the doorway, and you see three candles out of four blown out and one relighted—or, should the lights be put out here while you watch them, wait till three candles are lighted and then two put out. At either of these signals run back as hard as you can, for it will mean that I am waiting for you here."

While he was speaking, the girl had sought and seized one of his hands. She did not press it; she held it loosely, as it were timidly, caressingly. It was no grasp; it was a mere contact, as if only to make sure that he was there, that he was real and no mere darker shadow in the obscurity. The warmth of her hand gave Heyst a strange, intimate sensation of all her person. He had to fight down a new sort of emotion, which almost unmanned him. He went on, whispering sternly:

"But if you see no such signals, don't let anything—fear, curiosity, despair, or hope—entice you back to

this house; and with the first sign of the dawn steal away along the edge of the clearing till you strike the path. Wait no longer, because I shall probably be dead."

The murmur of the word "Never!" floated into his ear as if it had formed itself in the air.

"You know the path," he continued. "Make your way to the barricade. Go to Wang—yes, to Wang. Let nothing stop you!" It seemed to him that the girl's hand trembled a little. "The worst he can do to you is to shoot you; but he won't. I really think he won't, if I am not there. Stay with the villagers, with the wild people, and fear nothing. They will be more awed by you than you can be frightened of them. Davidson's bound to turn up before very long. Keep a lookout for a passing steamer. Think of some sort of signal to call him."

She made no answer. The sense of the heavy, brooding silence in the outside world seemed to enter and fill the room—the oppressive infinity of it, without breath, without light. It was as if the heart of hearts had ceased to beat and the end of all things had come.

"Have you understood? You are to run out of the house at once," Heyst whispered urgently.

She lifted his hand to her lips and let it go. He was startled.

"Lena!" he cried out under his breath.

She was gone from his side. He dared not trust himself—no, not even to the extent of a tender word.

Turning to go out, he heard a thud somewhere in the house. To open the door, he had first to lift the curtain; he did so with his face over his shoulder. The merest trickle of light, coming through the keyhole and one or two cracks, was enough for his eyes to see her plainly, all black, down on her knees, with her head and arms flung on the foot of the bed—all black in the desolation of a mourning sinner. What was this? A suspicion that there were everywhere more things than he could understand crossed Heyst's mind. Her arm, detached from the bed, motioned him away. He obeyed, and went out, full of disquiet.

The curtain behind him had not ceased to tremble when she was up on her feet, close against it, listening for sounds, for words, in a stooping, tragic attitude of stealthy attention, one hand clutching at her breast as if to compress, to make less loud, the beating of her heart. Heyst had caught Mr. Jones's secretary in the contemplation of his closed writing-desk. Ricardo might have been meditating how to break into it; but when he turned about suddenly, he showed so distorted a face that it made Heyst pause in wonder at the upturned whites of the eyes, which were blinking horribly, as if the man were inwardly convulsed.

"I thought you were never coming," Ricardo mumbled.

"I didn't know you were pressed for time. Even if your going away depends on this conversation, as you say, I doubt if you are the men to put to sea on such a night as this," said Heyst, motioning Ricardo to precede him out of the house.

With feline undulations of hip and shoulder, the secretary left the room at once. There was something cruel in the absolute dumbness of the night. The great cloud covering half the sky hung right against one, like an enormous curtain hiding menacing preparations of violence. As the feet of the two men touched the ground, a rumble came from behind it, preceded by a swift, mysterious gleam of light on the waters of the bay.

"Ha!" said Ricardo. "It begins."

"It may be nothing in the end," observed Heyst, stepping along steadily.

"No! Let it come!" Ricardo said viciously. "I am in the humour for it!"

By the time the two men had reached the other bungalow, the far-off, modulated rumble growled incessantly, while pale lightning in waves of cold fire flooded and ran off the island in rapid succession. Ricardo, unexpectedly, dashed ahead up the steps and put his head through the doorway.

"Here he is, governor! Keep him with you as long as you can—till you hear me whistle. I am on the track."

He flung these words into the room with inconceivable

speed, and stood aside to let the visitor pass through the doorway; but he had to wait an appreciable moment, because Heyst, seeing his purpose, had scornfully slowed his pace. When Heyst entered the room it was with a smile, the Heyst smile, lurking under his martial moustache.

XI

TWO candles were burning on the stand-up desk. Mr. Jones, tightly enfolded in an old but gorgeous blue silk dressing-gown, kept his elbows close against his sides and his hands deeply plunged into the extraordinarily deep pockets of the garment. The costume accentuated his emaciation. He resembled a painted pole leaning against the edge of the desk, with a dried head of dubious distinction stuck on the top of it. Ricardo lounged in the doorway. Indifferent, in appearance, to what was going on, he was biding his time. At a given moment, between two flickers of lightning, he melted out of his frame into the outer air. His disappearance was observed on the instant by Mr. Jones, who abandoned his nonchalant immobility against the desk, and made a few steps, calculated to put him between Heyst and the doorway.

"It's awfully close," he remarked.

Heyst, in the middle of the room, had made up his mind to speak plainly.

"We haven't met to talk about the weather. You favoured me earlier in the day with a rather cryptic phrase about yourself. 'I am he that is,' you said. What does that mean?"

Mr. Jones, without looking at Heyst, continued his absent-minded movements till, attaining the desired position, he brought his shoulders with a thump against the wall near the door, and raised his head. In the emotion of the decisive moment his haggard face glistened with perspiration. Drops ran down his hollow cheeks and almost blinded the spectral eyes in their bony caverns.

"It means that I am a person to be reckoned with

No—stop! Don't put your hand into your pocket—don't."

His voice had a wild, unexpected shrillness. Heyst started, and there ensued a moment of suspended animation, during which the thunder's deep bass muttered distantly and the doorway to the right of Mr. Jones flickered with bluish light. At last Heyst shrugged his shoulders; he even looked at his hand. He didn't put it in his pocket, however. Mr. Jones, glued against the wall, watched him raise both his hands to the ends of his horizontal moustaches, and answered the note of interrogation in his steady eyes.

"A matter of prudence," said Mr. Jones in his natural hollow tones, and with a face of deathlike composure. "A man of your free life has surely perceived that. Though you are a much-talked-about man, Mr. Heyst—as far as I understand, you are accustomed to employ the subtler weapons of intelligence, still I can't afford to take any risks of the—er—grosser methods. I am not unscrupulous enough to be a match for you in the use of intelligence; but I assure you, Mr. Heyst, that in the other way you are no match for me. I have you covered at this very moment. You have been covered ever since you entered this room. Yes—from my pocket."

During this harangue Heyst looked deliberately over his shoulder, stepped back a pace, and sat down on the end of the camp bedstead. Leaning his elbow on one knee, he laid his cheek in the palm of his hand and seemed to meditate on what he should say next. Mr. Jones, planted against the wall, was obviously waiting for some sort of overture. As nothing came, he resolved to speak himself; but he hesitated. For, though he considered that the most difficult step had been taken, he said to himself that every stage of progress required great caution, lest the man, in Ricardo's phraseology, should "start to prance"—which would be most inconvenient. He fell back on a previous statement:

"And I am a person to be reckoned with."

The other man went on looking at the floor, as if he were alone in the room. There was a pause.

"You have heard of me, then?" Heyst said at length, looking up.

"I should think so! We have been staying at Schomberg's hotel."

"Schom—" Heyst choked on the word.

"What's the matter, Mr. Heyst?"

"Nothing. Nausea," Heyst said resignedly. He resumed his former attitude of meditative indifference. "What is this reckoning you are talking about?" he asked after a time, in the quietest possible tone. "I don't know you."

"It's obvious that we belong to the same—social sphere," began Mr. Jones with languid irony. Inwardly he was as watchful as he could be. "Something has driven you out—the originality of your ideas, perhaps. Or your tastes."

Mr. Jones indulged in one of his ghastly smiles. In repose his features had a curious character of evil, exhausted austerity; but when he smiled, the whole mask took on an unpleasantly infantile expression. A recrudescence of the rolling thunder invaded the room loudly, and passed into silence.

"You are not taking this very well," observed Mr. Jones. This was what he said, but as a matter of fact he thought that the business was shaping quite satisfactorily. The man, he said to himself, had no stomach for a fight. Aloud he continued: "Come! You can't expect to have it always your own way. You are a man of the world."

"And you?" Heyst interrupted him unexpectedly "How do you define yourself?"

"I, my dear sir? In one way I am—yes, I am the world itself, come to pay you a visit. In another sense I am an outcast—almost an outlaw. If you prefer a less materialistic view, I am a sort of fate—the retribution that waits its time."

"I wish to goodness you were the commonest sort of ruffian!" said Heyst, raising his equable gaze to Mr. Jones. "One would be able to talk to you straight, then, and hope for some humanity. As it is—"

"I dislike violence and ferocity of every sort as much as

you do," Mr. Jones declared, looking very languid as he leaned against the wall, but speaking fairly loud. "You can ask my Martin if it is not so. This, Mr. Heyst, is a soft age. It is also an age without prejudices. I've heard that you are free from them yourself. You mustn't be shocked if I tell you plainly that we are after your money—or I am, if you prefer to make me alone responsible. Pedro, of course, knows no more of it than any other animal would. Ricardo is of the faithful retainer class—absolutely identified with all my ideas, wishes, and even whims."

Mr. Jones pulled his left hand out of his pocket, got a handkerchief out of another, and began to wipe the perspiration from his forehead, neck and chin. The excitement from which he suffered made his breathing visible. In his long dressing-gown he had the air of a convalescent invalid who had imprudently overtaxed his strength. Heyst, broad-shouldered, robust, watched the operation from the end of the camp bedstead, very calm, his hands on his knees.

"And by the by," he asked, "where is he now, that henchman of yours? Breaking into my desk?"

"That would be crude. Still, crudeness is one of life's conditions." There was the slightest flavour of banter in the tone of Ricardo's governor. "Conceivable, but unlikely. Martin is a little crude; but you are not, Mr. Heyst. To tell you the truth, I don't know precisely where he is. He has been a little mysterious of late; but he has my confidence. No, don't get up, Mr. Heyst!"

The viciousness of his spectral face was indescribable. Heyst, who had moved a little, was surprised by the disclosure.

"It was not my intention," he said.

"Pray remain seated," Mr. Jones insisted in a languid voice, but with a very determined glitter in his black eye-caverns.

"If you were more observant," said Heyst with dispassionate contempt, "you would have known before I had been five minutes in the room that I had no weapon of any sort on me."

"Possibly; but pray keep your hands still. They are very well where they are. This is too big an affair for me to take any risks."

"Big? Too big?" Heyst repeated with genuine surprise. "Good Heavens! Whatever you are looking for, there's very little of it here—very little of anything."

"You would naturally say so, but that's not what we have heard," retorted Mr. Jones quickly, with a grin so ghastly that it was impossible to think it voluntary.

Heyst's face had grown very gloomy. He knitted his brows.

"What have you heard?" he asked.

"A lot, Mr. Heyst—a lot," affirmed Mr. Jones. He was trying to recover his manner of languid superiority. "We have heard, for instance, of a certain Mr. Morrison, once your partner."

Heyst could not repress a slight movement.

"Aha!" said Mr. Jones, with a sort of ghostly glee on his face.

The muffled thunder resembled the echo of a distant cannonade below the horizon, and the two men seemed to be listening to it in sullen silence.

"This diabolical calumny will end in actually and literally taking my life from me," thought Heyst.

Then, suddenly, he laughed. Portentously spectral, Mr. Jones listened to the sound.

"Laugh as much as you please," he said. "I, who have been hounded out from society by a lot of highly moral souls, can't see anything funny in that story. But here we are, and you will now have to pay for your fun, Mr. Heyst."

"You have heard a lot of ugly lies," observed Heyst. "Take my word for it."

"You would say so, of course—very natural. As a matter of fact, I haven't heard very much. Strictly speaking, it was Martin. He collects information, and so on. You don't suppose I would talk to that Schomberg animal more than I could help? It was Martin whom he took into his confidence."

"The stupidity of that creature is so great that it

becomes formidable," Heyst said, as if speaking to himself.

Involuntarily, his mind turned to the girl, wandering in the forest, alone and terrified. Would he ever see her again? At that thought he nearly lost his self-possession. But the idea that if she followed his instructions those men were not likely to find her, steadied him a little. They did not know that the island had any inhabitants; and he himself once disposed of, they would be too anxious to get away to waste time hunting for a vanished girl.

All this passed through Heyst's mind in a flash, as men think in moments of danger. He looked speculatively at Mr. Jones, who, of course, had never for a moment taken his eyes from his intended victim. And the conviction came to Heyst that this outlaw from the higher spheres was an absolutely hard and pitiless scoundrel.

Mr. Jones's voice made him start.

"It would be useless, for instance, to tell me that your Chinaman has run off with your money. A man living alone with a Chinaman on an island takes care to conceal property of that kind so well that the devil himself—"

"Certainly," Heyst muttered.

Again, with his left hand, Mr. Jones mopped his frontal bone, his stalk-like neck, his razor jaws, his fleshless chin. Again his voice faltered and his aspect became still more gruesomely malevolent, as of a wicked and pitiless corpse.

"I see what you mean," he cried, "but you mustn't put too much trust in your ingenuity. You don't strike me as a very ingenious person, Mr. Heyst. Neither am I. My talents lie another way. But Martin—"

"Who is now engaged in rifling my desk," interjected Heyst.

"I don't think so. What I was going to say is that Martin is much cleverer than a Chinaman. Do you believe in racial superiority, Mr. Heyst? I do, firmly Martin is great at ferreting out such secrets as yours, for instance."

"Secrets like mine!" repeated Heyst bitterly. "Well, I wish him joy of all he can ferret out!"

"That's very kind of you," remarked Mr. Jones. He was beginning to be anxious for Martin's return. Of iron self-possession at the gaming-table, fearless in a sudden affray, he found that this rather special kind of work was telling on his nerves. "Keep still as you are!" he cried sharply.

"I've told you I am not armed," said Heyst, folding his arms on his breast.

"I am really inclined to believe that you are not," admitted Mr. Jones seriously. "Strange!" he mused aloud, the caverns of his eyes turned upon Heyst. Then briskly: "But my object is to keep you in this room. Don't provoke me, by some unguarded movement, to smash your knee or do something definite of that sort." He passed his tongue over his lips, which were dry and black, while his forehead glistened with moisture. "I don't know if it wouldn't be better to do it at once!"

"He who deliberates is lost," said Heyst with grave mockery.

Mr. Jones disregarded the remark. He had the air of communing with himself.

"Physically I am no match for you," he said slowly, his black gaze fixed upon the man sitting on the end of the bed. "You could spring—"

"Are you trying to frighten yourself?" asked Heyst abruptly. "You don't seem to have quite enough pluck for your business. Why don't you do it at once?"

Mr. Jones, taking violent offence, snorted like a savage skeleton.

"Strange as it may seem to you, it is because of my origin, my breeding, my traditions, my early associations, and such-like trifles. Not everybody can divest himself of the prejudices of a gentleman as easily as you have done, Mr. Heyst. But don't worry about my pluck. If you were to make a clean spring at me, you would receive in mid-air, so to speak, something that would make you perfectly harmless by the time you landed. No, don't misapprehend us, Mr. Heyst. We are—er—adequate bandits; and we are after the fruit of your labours as a—

er—successful swindler. It's the way of the world—gorge and disgorge!"

He inclined wearily his head on his left shoulder. His vitality seemed exhausted. Even his sunken eyelids drooped within the bony sockets. Only his thin, waspish, beautifully pencilled eyebrows, drawn together a little, suggested the will and the power to sting—something vicious, unconquerable, and deadly.

"Fruits! Swindler!" repeated Heyst, without heat, almost without contempt. "You are giving yourself no end of trouble, you and your faithful henchman, to crack an empty nut. There are no fruits here, as you imagine. There are a few sovereigns, which you may have if you like; and since you have called yourself a bandit—"

"Yaas!" drawled Mr. Jones. "That, rather than a swindler. Open warfare at least!"

"Very good! Only let me tell you that there were never in the world two more deluded bandits—never!"

Heyst uttered these words with such energy that Mr. Jones, stiffening up, seemed to become thinner and taller in his metallic blue dressing-gown against the whitewashed wall.

"Fooled by a silly, rascally innkeeper!" Heyst went on. "Talked over like a pair of children with a promise of sweets!"

"I didn't talk with that disgusting animal," muttered Mr. Jones sullenly; "but he convinced Martin, who is no fool."

"I should think he wanted very much to be convinced," said Heyst, with the courteous intonation so well known in the islands. "I don't want to disturb your touching trust in your—your follower, but he must be the most credulous brigand in existence. What do you imagine? If the story of my riches were ever so true, do you think Schomberg would have imparted it to you from sheer altruism? Is that the way of the world, Mr Jones?"

For a moment the lower jaw of Ricardo's gentleman dropped; but it came up with a snap of scorn, and he said with spectral intensity:

"The beast is cowardly! He was frightened, and wanted to get rid of us, if you want to know, Mr. Heyst. I don't know that the material inducement was so very great, but I was bored, and we decided to accept the bribe. I don't regret it. All my life I have been seeking new impressions, and you have turned out to be something quite out of the common. Martin, of course, looks to the material results. He's simple—and faithful—and wonderfully acute."

"Ah, yes! He's on the track"—and now Heyst's speech had the character of politely grim raillery—"but not sufficiently on the track, as yet, to make it quite convenient to shoot me without more ado. Didn't Schomberg tell you precisely where I conceal the fruit of my rapines? Pah! Don't you know he would have told you anything, true or false, from a very clear motive? Revenge! Mad hate—the unclean idiot!"

Mr. Jones did not seem very much moved. On his right hand the doorway incessantly flickered with distant lightning, and the continuous rumble of thunder went on irritatingly, like the growl of an inarticulate giant muttering fatuously.

Heyst overcame his immense repugnance to allude to her whose image, cowering in the forest, was constantly before his eyes, with all the pathos and force of its appeal, august, pitiful, and almost holy to him. It was in a hurried, embarrassed manner that he went on:

"If it had not been for that girl whom he persecuted with his insane and odious passion, and who threw herself on my protection, he would never have—but you know well enough!"

"I *don't* know!" burst out Mr. Jones with amazing heat. "That hotel-keeper tried to talk to me once of some girl he had lost, but I told him I didn't want to hear any of his beastly women stories. It had something to do with you, had it?"

Heyst looked on serenely at this outburst, then lost his patience a little.

"What sort of comedy is this? You don't mean to say that you didn't know that I had—that the girl was here?"

One could see that the eyes of Mr. Jones had become fixed in the depths of their black holes by the gleam of white becoming steady there. The whole man seemed frozen still.

"Here! Here!" he screamed out twice. There was no mistaking his astonishment, his shocked incredulity—something like frightened disgust.

Heyst was disgusted also, but in another way. He too was incredulous. He regretted having mentioned the girl; but the thing was done, his repugnance had been overcome in the heat of his argument against the absurd bandit.

"Is it possible that you didn't know of that significant fact?" he inquired. "Of the only effective truth in the welter of silly lies that deceived you so easily?"

"No, I didn't!" Mr. Jones shouted. "But Martin did!" he added in a faint whisper, which Heyst's ears just caught and no more.

"I kept her out of sight as long as I could," said Heyst. "Perhaps, with your bringing up, traditions, and so on, you will understand my reason for it."

"He knew. He knew before!" Mr. Jones mourned in a hollow voice. "He knew of her from the first!"

Backed hard against the wall, he no longer watched Heyst. He had the air of a man who had seen an abyss yawning under his feet.

"If I want to kill him, this is my time," thought Heyst; but he did not move.

Next moment Mr. Jones jerked his head up, glaring with sardonic fury.

"I have a good mind to shoot you, you woman-ridden hermit, you man in the moon, that can't exist without—no, it won't be you that I'll shoot. It's the other woman, lover—the prevaricating, sly, low-class, amorous cuss. And he shaved—shaved under my very nose. I'll shoot him!"

"He's gone mad," thought Heyst, startled by the spectre's sudden fury.

He felt himself more in danger, nearer death, than ever since he had entered that room. An insane bandit

is a deadly combination. He did not, could not know that Mr. Jones was quick-minded enough to see already the end of his reign over his excellent secretary's thoughts and feelings; the coming failure of Ricardo's fidelity. A woman had intervened! A woman, a girl, who apparently possessed the power to awaken men's disgusting folly. Her power had been proved in two instances already—the beastly innkeeper, and that man with moustaches, upon whom Mr. Jones, his deadly right hand twitching in his pocket, glared more in repulsion than in anger. The very object of the expedition was lost from view in his sudden and overwhelming sense of utter insecurity. And this made Mr. Jones feel very savage; but not against the man with the moustaches. Thus, while Heyst was really feeling that his life was not worth two minutes' purchase, he heard himself addressed with no affectation of languid impertinence, but with a burst of feverish determination.

"Here! Let's call a truce!" said Mr. Jones.

Heyst's heart was too sick to allow him to smile.

"Have I been making war on you?" he asked wearily. "How do you expect me to attach any meaning to your words?" he went on. "You seem to be a morbid, senseless sort of bandit. We don't speak the same language. If I were to tell you why I am here, talking to you, you wouldn't believe me, because you would not understand me. It certainly isn't the love of life, from which I have divorced myself long ago—not sufficiently, perhaps; but if you are thinking of yours, then I repeat to you that it has never been in danger from me. I am unarmed."

Mr. Jones was biting his lower lip, in a deep meditation. It was only toward the last that he looked at Heyst.

"Unarmed, eh?" Then he burst out violently: "I tell you, a gentleman is no match for the common herd. And yet one must make use of them. Unarmed, eh? And I suppose that creature is of the commonest sort. You could hardly have got her out of a drawing-room. Though they're all alike, for that matter. Unarmed! It's a pity. I am in much greater danger than you are, or were—or I am much mistaken. But I am not—I know my man!"

He lost his air of mental vacancy and broke out into shrill exclamations. To Heyst they seemed madder than anything that had gone before.

"On the track! On the scent!" he cried, forgetting himself to the point of executing a dance of rage in the middle of the floor.

Heyst looked on, fascinated by this skeleton in a gay dressing-gown, jerkily agitated like a grotesque toy on the end of an invisible string. It became quiet suddenly.

"I might have smelt a rat. I always knew that this would be the danger." He changed suddenly to a confidential tone, fixing his sepulchral stare on Heyst. "And yet here I am, taken in by the fellow, like the veriest fool. I've been always on the watch for some such beastly influence, but here I am, fairly caught. He shaved himself right in front of me—and I never guessed!"

The shrill laugh, following on the low tone of secrecy, sounded so convincingly insane that Heyst got up as if moved by a spring. Mr. Jones stepped back two paces, but displayed no uneasiness.

"It's as clear as daylight!" he uttered mournfully, and fell silent.

Behind him the doorway flickered lividly, and the sound as of a naval action somewhere away on the horizon filled the breathless pause. Mr. Jones inclined his head over his shoulder. His mood had completely changed.

"What do you say, unarmed man? Shall we go and see what is detaining my trusted Martin so long? He asked me to keep you engaged in friendly conversation till he made a further examination of that track. Ha, ha, ha!"

"He is no doubt ransacking my house," said Heyst.

He was bewildered. It seemed to him that all this was an incomprehensible dream, or perhaps an elaborate other-world joke, contrived by that spectre in a gorgeous dressing-gown.

Mr. Jones looked at him with a horrible, cadaverous smile of inscrutable mockery, and pointed to the door. Heyst passed through it first. His feelings had become so

blunted that he did not care how soon he was shot in the back.

"How oppressive the air is!" the voice of Mr. Jones said at his elbow. "This stupid storm gets on my nerves. I would welcome some rain, though it would be unpleasant to get wet. On the other hand, this exasperating thunder has the advantage of covering the sound of our approach. The lightning's not so convenient. Ah, your house is fully illuminated! My clever Martin is punishing your stock of candles. He belongs to the unceremonious classes, which are also unlovely, untrustworthy, and so on."

"I left the candles burning," said Heyst, "to save him trouble."

"You really believed he would go to your house?" asked Mr. Jones with genuine interest.

"I had that notion, strongly. I do believe he is there now."

"And you don't mind?"

"No!"

"You don't?" Mr. Jones stopped to wonder. "You are an extraordinary man," he said suspiciously, and moved on, touching elbows with Heyst.

In the latter's breast dwelt a deep silence, the complete silence of unused faculties. At this moment, by simply shouldering Mr. Jones, he could have thrown him down and put himself, by a couple of leaps, beyond the certain aim of the revolver; but he did not even think of that. His very will seemed dead of weariness. He moved automatically, his head low, like a prisoner captured by the evil power of a masquerading skeleton out of the grave. Mr. Jones took charge of the direction. They fetched a wide sweep. The echoes of distant thunder seemed to dog their footsteps.

"By the by," said Mr. Jones, as if unable to restrain his curiosity, "aren't you anxious about that—ouch!—that fascinating creature to whom you owe whatever pleasure you can find in our visit?"

"I have placed her in safety," said Heyst. "I—I took good care of that."

Mr. Jones laid a hand on his arm.

"You have? Look! Is that what you mean?"

Heyst raised his head. In the flicker of lightning the desolation of the cleared ground on his left leaped out and sank into the night, together with the elusive forms of things distant, pale, unearthly. But in the brilliant square of the door he saw the girl—the woman he had longed to see once more—as if enthroned, with her hands on the arms of the chair. She was in black; her face was white, her head dreamily inclined on her breast. He saw her only as low as her knees. He saw her—there, in the room, alive with a sombre reality. It was no mocking vision. She was not in the forest—but there! She sat there in the chair, seemingly without strength, yet without fear, tenderly stooping.

"Can you understand their power?" whispered the hot breath of Mr. Jones into his ear. "Can there be a more disgusting spectacle? It's enough to make the earth detestable. She seems to have found her affinity. Move on closer. If I have to shoot you in the end, then perhaps you will die cured."

Heyst obeyed the pushing pressure of a revolver barrel between his shoulders. He felt it distinctly, but he did not feel the ground under his feet. They found the steps without his being aware that he was ascending them—slowly, one by one. Doubt entered into him—a doubt of a new kind, formless, hideous. It seemed to spread itself all over him, enter his limbs, and lodge in his entrails. He stopped suddenly, with a thought that he who experienced such a feeling had no business to live—or perhaps was no longer living.

Everything—the bungalow, the forest, the open ground—trembled incessantly; the earth, the sky itself, shivered all the time, and the only thing immovable in the shuddering universe was the interior of the lighted room and the woman in black sitting in the light of the eight candle flames. They flung around her an intolerable brilliance which hurt his eyes, seemed to sear his very brain with the radiation of infernal heat. It was some time before his scorched eyes made out Ricardo seated on the floor at some little distance, his back to the doorway, but only partly

so; one side of his upturned face showing the absorbed, all-forgetful rapture of his contemplation.

The grip of Mr. Jones's hard claw drew Heyst back a little In the roll of thunder, swelling and subsiding, he whispered in his ear a sarcastic: "Of course!"

A great shame descended upon Heyst—the shame of guilt, absurd and maddening. Mr. Jones drew him still farther back into the darkness of the veranda.

"This is serious," he went on, distilling his ghostly venom into Heyst's very ear. "I had to shut my eyes many times to his little flings; but this is serious. He has found his soul-mate. Mud souls, obscene and cunning! Mud bodies, too—the mud of the gutter! I tell you, we are no match for the vile populace. I, even I, have been nearly caught. He asked me to detain you till he gave me the signal. It won't be you that I'll have to shoot, but him. I wouldn't trust him near me for five minutes after this!"

He shook Heyst's arm a little.

"If you had not happened to mention the creature, we should both have been dead before morning. He would have stabbed you as you came down the steps after leaving me, and then he would have walked up to me and planted the same knife between my ribs. He has no prejudices. The viler the origin, the greater the freedom of these simple souls!"

He drew a cautious, hissing breath and added in an agitated murmur: "I can see right into his mind; I have been nearly caught napping by his cunning."

He stretched his neck to peer into the room from the side. Heyst, too, made a step forward, under the slight impulse of that slender hand clasping his arm with a thin, bony grasp.

"Behold!" the skeleton of the crazy bandit jabbered thinly into his ear in spectral fellowship. "Behold the simple Acis kissing the sandals of the nymph, on the way to her lips, all forgetful, while the menacing fife of Polyphemus already sounds close at hand—if he could only hear it! Stoop a little."

XII

ON returning to the Heyst bungalow, rapid as if on wings, Ricardo found Lena waiting for him. She was dressed in black; and at once his uplifting exultation was replaced by an awed and quivering patience before her white face, before the immobility of her reposeful pose, the more amazing to him who had encountered the strength of her limbs and the indomitable spirit in her body. She had come out after Heyst's departure, and had sat down under the portrait to wait for the return of the man of violence and death. While lifting the curtain, she felt the anguish of her disobedience to her lover, which was soothed by a feeling she had known before—a gentle flood of penetrating sweetness. She was not automatically obeying a momentary suggestion; she was under influences more deliberate, more vague, and of greater potency. She had been prompted, not by her will, but by a force that was outside of her and more worthy. She reckoned upon nothing definite; she had calculated nothing. She saw only her purpose of capturing death—savage, sudden, irresponsible death, prowling round the man who possessed her; death embodied in the knife ready to strike into his heart. No doubt it had been a sin to throw herself into his arms. With that inspiration that descends at times from above for the good or evil of our common mediocrity, she had a sense of having been for him only a violent and sincere choice of curiosity and pity—a thing that passes. She did not know him. If he were to go away from her and disappear, she would utter no reproach, she would not resent it; for she would hold in herself the impress of something most rare and precious—his embraces made her own by her courage in saving his life.

All she thought of—the essence of her tremors, her flushes of heat, and her shudders of cold—was the question how to get hold of that knife, the mark and sign of stalking death. A tremor of impatience to clutch the frightful thing, glimpsed once and unforgettable, agitated her hands

The instinctive flinging forward of these hands stopped Ricardo dead short between the door and her chair, with the ready obedience of a conquered man who can bide his time. Her success disconcerted her. She listened to the man's impassioned transports of terrible eulogy and even more awful declarations of love. She was even able to meet his eyes, oblique, apt to glide away, throwing feral gleams of desire.

"No!" he was saying, after a fiery outpouring of words in which the most ferocious phrases of love were mingled with wooing accents of entreaty. "I will have no more of it! Don't you mistrust me. I am sober in my talk. Feel how quietly my heart beats. Ten times to-day when you, you, you, swam in my eye, I thought it would burst one of my ribs or leap out of my throat. It has knocked itself dead tired, waiting for this evening, for this very minute. And now it can do no more. Feel how quiet it is!"

He made a step forward, but she raised her clear voice commandingly:

"No nearer!"

He stopped with a smile of imbecile worship on his lips, and with the delighted obedience of a man who could at any moment seize her in his hands and dash her to the ground.

"Ah! If I had taken you by the throat that morning and had my way with you, I should never have known what you are. And now I do. You are a wonder! And so am I, in my way. I have nerve, and I have brains, too. We should have been lost many times but for me. I plan—I plot for my gentleman. Gentleman—pah! I am sick of him. And you are sick of yours, eh? You, you!"

He shook all over; he cooed at her a string of endearing names, obscene and tender, and then asked abruptly:

"Why don't you speak to me?"

"It's my part to listen," she said, giving him an inscrutable smile, with a flush on her cheek and her lips cold as ice.

"But you will answer me?"

"Yes," she said, her eyes dilated as if with sudden interest.

"Where's that plunder? Do you know?"

"No! Not yet."

"But there is plunder stowed somewhere that's worth having?"

"Yes, I think so. But who knows?" she added after a pause.

"And who cares?" he retorted recklessly. "I've had enough of this crawling on my belly. It's you who are my treasure. It's I who found you out where a gentleman had buried you to rot for his accursed pleasure!"

He looked behind him and all around for a seat, then turned to her his troubled eyes and dim smile.

"I am dog-tired," he said, and sat down on the floor. "I went tired this morning, since I came in here and started talking to you—as tired as if I had been pouring my life-blood here on these planks for you to dabble your white feet in."

Unmoved, she nodded at him thoughtfully. Woman-like, all her faculties remained concentrated on her heart's desire—on the knife—while the man went on babbling insanely at her feet, ingratiating and savage, almost crazy with elation. But he, too, was holding on to his purpose.

"For you! For you I will throw away money, lives—all the lives but mine! What you want is a man, a master that will let you put the heel of your shoe on his neck; not that skulker, who will get tired of you in a year—and you of him. And then what? You are not the one to sit still; neither am I. I live for myself, and you shall live for yourself, too—not for a Swedish baron. They make a convenience of people like you and me. A gentleman is better than an employer, but an equal partnership against all the 'yporcrits is the thing for you and me. We'll go on wandering the world over, you and I, both free and both true. You are no cage bird. We'll rove together, for we are of them that have no homes. We are born rovers!"

She listened to him with the utmost attention, as if

any unexpected word might give her some sort of opening to get that dagger, that awful knife—to disarm murder itself, pleading for her love at her feet. Again she nodded at him thoughtfully, rousing a gleam in his yellow eyes, yearning devotedly upon her face. When he hitched himself a little closer, her soul had no movement of recoil. This had to be. Anything had to be which would bring the knife within her reach. He talked more confidentially now.

"We have met, and their time has come," he began, looking up into her eyes. "The partnership between me and my gentleman has to be ripped up. There's no room for him where we two are. Why, he would shoot me like a dog! Don't you worry. This will settle it not later than to-night!"

He tapped his folded leg below the knee, and was surprised, flattered, by the lighting up of her face, which stooped toward him eagerly and remained expectant, the lips girlishly parted, red in the pale face, and quivering in the quickened drawing of her breath.

"You marvel, you miracle, you man's luck and joy—one in a million! No, the only one! You have found your man in me," he whispered tremulously. "Listen! They are having their last talk together; for I'll do for your gentleman, too, by midnight!"

Without the slightest tremor she murmured, as soon as the tightening of her breast had eased off and the words would come:

"I wouldn't be in too much of a hurry—with him."

The pause, the tone, had all the value of meditated advice.

"Good, thrifty girl!" he laughed low, with a strange feline gaiety, expressed by the undulating movement of his shoulders and the sparkling snap of his oblique eyes. "You are still thinking about the chance of that swag. You'll make a good partner, that you will! And I say, what a decoy you will make! Jee-miny!"

He was carried away for a moment, but his face darkened swiftly.

"No! No reprieve. What do you think a fellow is

—a scarecrow? All hat and clothes and no feeling, no inside, no brain to make fancies for himself? No!" he went on violently. "Never in his life will he go again into that room of yours—never any more!"

A silence fell. He was gloomy with the torment of his jealousy, and did not even look at her. She sat up and slowly, gradually, bent lower and lower over him, as if ready to fall into his arms. He looked up at last, and checked this droop unwittingly.

"Say! You, who are up to fighting a man with your bare hands, could you—eh?—could you manage to stick one with a thing like that knife of mine?"

She opened her eyes very wide and gave him a wild smile.

"How can I tell?" she whispered enchantingly. "Will you let me have a look at it?"

Without taking his eyes from her face, he pulled the knife out of its sheath—a short, broad, cruel, double-edged blade with a bone handle—and only then looked down at it.

"A good friend," he said simply. "Take it in your hand and feel the balance," he suggested.

At the moment when she bent forward to receive it from him, there was a flash of fire in her mysterious eyes—a red gleam in the white mist which wrapped the promptings and longings of her soul. She had done it! The very sting of death was in her hands; the venom of the viper in her paradise, extracted, safe in her possession—and its head all but lying under her heel. Ricardo, stretched on the mats of the floor, crept closer and closer to the chair in which she sat.

All her thoughts were busy planning how to keep possession of that weapon which had seemed to have drawn into itself every danger and menace on the death-ridden earth. She said with a low laugh, the exultation in which he failed to recognise:

"I didn't think that you would ever trust me with that thing!"

"Why not?"

"For fear I should suddenly strike you with it."

"What for? For this morning's work? Oh, no! There's no spite in you for that. You forgave me. You saved me. You got the better of me, too. And anyhow, what good would it be?"

"No, no good," she admitted.

In her heart she felt that she would not know how to do it; that if it came to a struggle, she would have to drop the dagger and fight with her hands.

"Listen. When we are going about the world together, you shall always call me husband. Do you hear?"

"Yes," she said, bracing herself for the contest, in whatever shape it was coming.

The knife was lying in her lap. She let it slip into the fold of her dress, and laid her forearms with clasped fingers over her knees, which she pressed desperately together. The dreaded thing was out of sight at last. She felt a dampness break out all over her.

"I am not going to hide you, like that good-for-nothing, finicky, sneery gentleman. You shall be my pride and my chum. Isn't that better than rotting on an island for the pleasure of a gentleman, till he gives you the chuck?"

"I'll be anything you like," she said.

In his intoxication he crept closer with every word she uttered, with every movement she made.

"Give your foot," he begged in a timid murmur, and in the full consciousness of his power.

Anything! Anything to keep murder quiet and disarmed till strength had returned to her limbs and she could make up her mind what to do. Her fortitude had been shaken by the very facility of success that had come to her. She advanced her foot forward a little from under the hem of her skirt; and he threw himself on it greedily. She was not even aware of him. She had thought of the forest, to which she had been told to run. Yes, the forest—that was the place for her to carry off the terrible spoil, the sting of vanquished death. Ricardo, clasping her ankle, pressed his lips time after time to the instep, muttering gasping words that were like sobs, making little noises that resembled the sounds of grief and distress. Unheard by them both, the thunder growled distantly with angry modulations of its

tremendous voice, while the world outside shuddered incessantly around the dead stillness of the room where the framed profile of Heyst's father looked severely into space.

Suddenly Ricardo felt himself spurned by the foot he had been cherishing—spurned with a push of such violence into the very hollow of his throat that it swung him back instantly into an upright position on his knees. He read his danger in the stony eyes of the girl; and in the very act of leaping to his feet he heard sharply, detached on the comminatory voice of the storm, the brief report of a shot which half stunned him, in the manner of a blow. He turned his burning head, and saw Heyst towering in the doorway. The thought that the beggar had started to prance darted through his mind. For a fraction of a second his distracted eyes sought for his weapon all over the floor. He couldn't see it.

"Stick him, you!" he called hoarsely to the girl, and dashed headlong for the door of the compound.

While he thus obeyed the instinct of self-preservation, his reason was telling him that he could not possibly reach it alive. It flew open, however, with a crash, before his launched weight, and instantly he swung it to behind him. There, his shoulder leaning against it, his hands clinging to the handle, dazed and alone in the night full of shudders and muttered menaces, he tried to pull himself together. He asked himself if he had been shot at more than once. His shoulder was wet with the blood trickling from his head. Feeling above his ear, he ascertained that it was only a graze, but the shock of the surprise had unmanned him for the moment.

What the deuce was the governor about, to let the beggar break loose like this? Or—was the governor dead, perhaps?

The silence within the room awed him. Of going back there could be no question.

"But she knows how to take care of herself," he muttered.

She had his knife. It was she now who was deadly, while he was disarmed, no good for the moment. He stole away from the door, staggering, the warm trickle running down

his neck, to find out what had become of the governor and to provide himself with a firearm from the armoury in the trunks.

XIII

MR. JONES, after firing his shot over Heyst's shoulder, had thought it proper to dodge away. Like the spectre he was, he had noiselessly vanished from the veranda. Heyst stumbled into the room and looked around. All the objects in there—the books, the gleam of old silver familiar to him from boyhood, the very portrait on the wall—seemed shadowy, unsubstantial, the dumb accomplices of an amazing dream-plot ending in an illusory effect of awakening and the impossibility of ever closing his eyes again. With dread he forced himself to look at the girl. Still in the chair, she was leaning forward far over her knees, and had hidden her face in her hands. Heyst remembered Wang suddenly. How clear all this was—and how extremely amusing! Very.

She sat up a little, then leaned back, and, taking her hands from her face, pressed both of them to her breast, as if moved to the heart by seeing him there looking at her with a black, horror-struck curiosity. He would have pitied her, if the triumphant expression of her face had not given him a shock which destroyed the balance of his feelings. She spoke with an accent of wild joy:

"I knew you would come back in time! You are safe now. I have done it! I would never, never have let him—" Her voice died out, while her eyes shone at him as when the sun breaks through a mist. "Never get it back. Oh, my beloved!"

He bowed his head gravely, and said in his polite Heystian tone:

"No doubt you acted from instinct. Women have been provided with their own weapon. I was a disarmed man, I have been a disarmed man all my life as I see it now. You may glory in your resourcefulness and your profound knowledge of yourself; but I may say that the other

attitude, suggestive of shame, had its charm. For you are full of charm!"

The exultation vanished from her face.

"You mustn't make fun of me now. I know no shame. I was thanking God with all my sinful heart for having been able to do it—for giving you to me in that way—oh, my beloved—all my own at last!"

He stared as if mad. Timidly she tried to excuse herself for disobeying his directions for her safety. Every modulation of her enchanting voice cut deep into his very breast, so that he could hardly understand the words for the sheer pain of it. He turned his back on her; but a sudden drop, an extraordinary faltering of her tone, made him spin round. On her white neck her pale head drooped as in a cruel drought a withered flower droops on its stalk. He caught his breath, looked at her closely, and seemed to read some awful intelligence in her eyes. At the moment when her eyelids fell as if smitten from above by an invisible power, he snatched her up bodily out of the chair, and diregarding an unexpected metallic clatter on the floor, carried her off into the other room. The limpness of her body frightened him. Laying her down on the bed, he ran out again, seized a four-branched candlestick on the table, and ran back, tearing down with a furious jerk the curtain that swung stupidly in his way; but after putting the candlestick on the table by the bed, he remained absolutely idle. There did not seem anything more for him to do. Holding his chin in his hand, he looked down intently at her still face.

"Has she been stabbed with this thing?" asked Davidson, whom suddenly he saw standing by his side and holding up Ricardo's dagger to his sight. Heyst uttered no word of recognition or surprise. He gave Davidson only a dumb look of unutterable awe; then, as if possessed with a sudden fury, started tearing open the front of the girl's dress. She remained insensible under his hands, and Heyst let out a groan which made Davidson shudder inwardly—the heavy plaint of a man who falls clubbed in the dark.

They stood side by side, looking mournfully at the little

black hole made by Mr. Jones's bullet under the swelling breast of a dazzling and as it were sacred whiteness. It rose and fell slightly—so slightly that only the eyes of the lover could detect the faint stir of life. Heyst, calm and utterly unlike himself in the face, moving about noiselessly, prepared a wet cloth, and laid it on the insignificant wound, round which there was hardly a trace of blood to mar the charm, the fascination, of that mortal flesh.

Her eyelids fluttered. She looked drowsily about, serene, as if fatigued only by the exertions of her tremendous victory, capturing the very sting of death in the service of love. But her eyes became very wide awake when they caught sight of Ricardo's dagger, the spoil of vanquished death, which Davidson was still holding unconsciously.

"Give it to me!" she said. "It's mine."

Davidson put the symbol of her victory into her feeble hands extended to him with the innocent gesture of a child reaching eagerly for a toy.

"For you," she gasped, turning her eyes to Heyst. "Kill nobody."

"No," said Heyst, taking the dagger and laying it gently on her breast, while her hands fell powerless by her side.

The faint smile on her deep-cut lips waned, and her head sank deep into the pillow, taking on the majestic pallor and immobility of marble. But over the muscles which seemed set in their transfigured beauty for ever, passed a slight and awful tremor. With an amazing strength she asked loudly:

"What's the matter with me?"

"You have been shot, dear Lena," Heyst said in a steady voice, while Davidson, at the question, turned away and leaned his forehead against the post at the foot of the bed.

"Shot? I did think, too, that something had struck me."

Over Samburan the thunder had ceased to growl at last, and the world of material forms shuddered no more under the emerging stars. The spirit of the girl which

was passing away from under them clung to her triumph, convinced of the reality of her victory over death.

"No more," she muttered. "There will be no more! Oh, my beloved," she cried weakly, "I've saved you! Why don't you take me into your arms and carry me out of this lonely place?"

Heyst bent low over her, cursing his fastidious soul, which even at that moment kept the true cry of love from his lips in its infernal mistrust of all life. He dared not touch her, and she had no longer the strength to throw her arms about his neck.

"Who else could have done this for you?" she whispered gloriously.

"No one in the world," he answered her in a murmur of unconcealed despair.

She tried to raise herself, but all she could do was to lift her head a little from the pillow. With a terrified and gentle movement, Heyst hastened to slip his arm under her neck. She felt relieved at once of an intolerable weight, and was content to surrender to him the infinite weariness of her tremendous achievement. Exulting, she saw herself extended on the bed, in a black dress, and profoundly at peace; while, stooping over her with a kindly playful smile, he was ready to lift her up in his firm arms and take her into the sanctuary of his innermost heart—for ever! The flush of rapture flooding her whole being broke out in a smile of innocent, girlish happiness; and with that divine radiance on her lips she breathed her last, triumphant, seeking for his glance in the shades of death.

XIV

"YES, Excellency," said Davidson in his placid voice; "there are more dead in this affair—more white people, I mean—than have been killed in many of the battles of the last Achin war."

Davidson was talking with an Excellency, because what was alluded to in conversation as "the mystery of

Samburan" had caused such a sensation in the Archipelago that even those in the highest spheres were anxious to hear something at first hand. Davidson had been summoned to an audience. It was a high official on his tour.

"You knew the late Baron Heyst well?"

"The truth is that nobody out here can boast of having known him well," said Davidson. "He was a queer chap. I doubt if he himself knew how queer he was. But everybody was aware that I was keeping my eye on him in a friendly way. And that's how I got the warning which made me turn round in my tracks in the middle of my trip and steam back to Samburan, where, I am grieved to say, I arrived too late."

Without enlarging very much, Davidson explained to the attentive Excellency how a woman, the wife of a certain hotel-keeper named Schomberg, had overheard two card-sharping rascals making inquiries from her husband as to the exact position of the island. She caught only a few words referring to the neighbouring volcano, but these were enough to arouse her suspicions—"which," went on Davidson, "she imparted to me, your Excellency. They were only too well founded!"

"That was very clever of her," remarked the great man.

"She's much cleverer than people have any conception of," said Davidson.

But he refrained from disclosing to the Excellency the real cause which had sharpened Mrs. Schomberg's wits. The poor woman was in mortal terror of the girl being brought back within reach of her infatuated Wilhelm. Davidson only said that her agitation had impressed him; but he confessed that while going back, he began to have his doubts as to there being anything in it.

"I steamed into one of those silly thunderstorms that hang about the volcano, and had some trouble in making the island," narrated Davidson. "I had to grope my way dead slow into Diamond Bay. I don't suppose that anybody, even if looking out for me, could have heard me let go the anchor."

He admitted that he ought to have gone ashore at

once; but everything was perfectly dark and absolutely quiet. He felt ashamed of his impulsiveness. What a fool he would have looked waking up a man in the middle of the night just to ask him if he was all right! And then, the girl being there, he feared that Heyst would look upon his visit as an unwarrantable intrusion.

The first intimation he had of there being something wrong was a big white boat, adrift, with the dead body of a very hairy man inside, bumping against the bows of his steamer. Then indeed he lost no time in going ashore —alone, of course, from motives of delicacy.

"I arrived in time to see that poor girl die, as I have told your Excellency," pursued Davidson. "I won't tell you what a time I had with him afterward. He talked to me. His father seems to have been a crank, and to have upset his head when he was young. He was a queer chap. Practically the last words he said to me, as we came out on the veranda, were:

"'Ah, Davidson, woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love—and to put its trust in life!'

"As we stood there, just before I left him, for he said he wanted to be alone with his dead for a time, we heard a snarly sort of voice near the bushes by the shore calling out:

"'Is that you, governor?'

"'Yes, it's me.'

"'Jeeminy! I thought the beggar had done for you. He has started prancing and nearly had me. I have been dodging around, looking for you ever since.'

"'Well, here I am,' suddenly screamed the other voice, and then a shot rang out.

"'This time he has not missed him,' Heyst said to me bitterly, and went back into the house.

"I returned on board as he had insisted I should do. I didn't want to intrude on his grief. Later, about five in the morning, some of my calashes came running to me, yelling that there was a fire ashore. I landed at once, of course. The principal bungalow was blazing. The heat drove us back. The other two houses caught one after

another like kindling-wood. There was no going beyond the shore end of the jetty till the afternoon."

Davidson sighed placidly.

"I suppose you are certain that Baron Heyst is dead?"

"He is—ashes, your Excellency," said Davidson, wheezing a little; "he and the girl together. I suppose he couldn't stand his thoughts before her dead body—and fire purifies everything. That Chinaman of whom I told your Excellency helped me to investigate next day, when the embers got cooled a little. We found enough to be sure. He's not a bad Chinaman. He told me that he had followed Heyst and the girl through the forest from pity, and partly out of curiosity. He watched the house till he saw Heyst go out, after dinner, and Ricardo come back alone. While he was dodging there, it occurred to him that he had better cast the boat adrift, for fear those scoundrels should come round by water and bombard the village from the sea with their revolvers and Winchesters. He judged that they were devils enough for anything. So he walked down the wharf quietly; and as he got into the boat, to cast her off, that hairy man who, it seems, was dozing in her, jumped up growling, and Wang shot him dead. Then he shoved the boat off as far as he could and went away."

There was a pause. Presently Davidson went on, in his tranquil manner:

"Let Heaven look after what has been purified. The wind and rain will take care of the ashes. The carcass of that follower, secretary, or whatever the unclean ruffian called himself, I left where it lay, to swell and rot in the sun. His principal had shot him neatly through the heart. Then, apparently, this Jones went down the wharf to look for the boat and for the hairy man. I suppose he tumbled into the water by accident—or perhaps not by accident. The boat and the man were gone, and the scoundrel saw himself all alone, his game clearly up, and fairly trapped. Who knows? The water's very clear there, and I could see him huddled up on the bottom between two piles, like a heap of bones in a blue silk bag, with only the head and the feet sticking out. Wang

was very pleased when we discovered him. That made everything safe, he said, and he went at once over the hill to fetch his Alfuro woman back to the hut."

Davidson took out his handkerchief to wipe the perspiration off his forehead.

"And then, your Excellency, I went away. There was nothing to be done there."

"Clearly," assented the Excellency.

Davidson, thoughtful, seemed to weigh the matter in his mind, and then murmured with placid sadness:

"Nothing!"

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